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Reveries of the existential:

a psychoanalytic observation of young children's existential  
encounters at the nursery

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the following thesis has been composed by myself, and that the work is my own.

Zoi Simopoulou

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<sup>1</sup> From Bachelard's House and Universe

## Abstract

This study is an exploration of five children's relationship with the existential as it is played out in their everydayness at the nursery. Previous research in the field has looked at teachers' perceptions of pre-school children's existential questions, showing, thus, a place for a study on children's existential encounters. My focus lies with the subjective meanings and the emotional qualities of these encounters, specifically how they are embodied in children's play in the form of a word but also an object, an image, a movement or silence as well as in their ordinary doing and their very being at the nursery. I am also interested in how the existential reveals itself in children's everyday relationships with others as well as how it is precisely through my relationship with them that I, as someone who looks for it, can get closer to it.

For that I use psychoanalytic observation as a methodology that stays with the child's interior worlds as they unfold in her play and in the relationship with the observer. My methodology is informed by relational psychoanalytic thinking and feminist writings that allow me to locate meaning in the liminal spaces between the self and the other, the interior and the exterior. In the analysis, I use writing as inquiry as a means to explore an integrative approach by moving between psychoanalytic theories and existential-phenomenological ideas to think the existential with.

I explore children's existential encounters with the questions of nothingness, strangeness, ontological insecurity, death and selfhood as they emerged in the context of our relationship in the course of the observations. I also discuss how time, space and relationship - as inherent in the existential but also implicated in the method of psychoanalytic observation - manifested in children's existential encounters. Finally, I look at the idea of the interpersonal unconscious as a creative source of meaning and discuss how the existential emerged embodied in symbolic articulations in the form of character, imagery, sounds and scents.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Contextualisation of the research

This writing speaks to the times that I stood by a child gazing silently and taken by the poignancy of what they had just said or done whilst also unable to grasp a meaning of it. This moment moves me *and* immobilises me. I am moved by the child's meaningfulness in a manner that feels almost concrete, physical and enlivening. Awakened to something fresh and new, how do I begin to make sense of it? How do I stay true to its newness? How do I stay true to it, capture it without deadening it?

Moments like this first began to emerge during my play work with primary school children:

They play out their experiences, their agonies and their pleasures but some times more than others their play struck me as significant. What are these moments made of? They arrive with a captivating meaningfulness: located in children's lives yet existentially nuanced. They play in a manner that feels reflective and contemplative; a turning inwards to take some of the world in and to make sense of it. Perhaps it is this observing quality - capacity - of the children that gives these moments some of their distinctive existential nuance: they arrive busily embedded in their everydayness and give in to an attentive silence. A pause that asks me to speak to it. How do I speak to it? How am I present in this moment?

In need of a space to pause and think of the children's play, I started my training in psychoanalytic observation. The course is informed by psychoanalytic thinking and involves a 2-year observation of an infant in the family and a 1-year observation of a young child at nursery.

Psychoanalytic observation was first established in 1948 by Esther Bick as part of the Tavistock child psychotherapy training, as a method of directly observing infants and children in their natural environments in order to understand the nature of their mental processes (Bick, 1964, Shuttleworth, 1997, Urwin & Sternberg, 2012). Current trainings in psychoanalytic observation take diverse perspectives according to their geographical and theoretical context. My course in psychoanalytic observation in Scotland at the time I do it, is largely informed by the theoretical tradition of British object relations and particularly by Klein's model of infant development. Drawing on Klein's (1997a) discussion of the analytic playroom as a 'total situation' encompassing of both the child's past and present, in my observations I reflect upon the surrounding subjects as external representations of internal unconscious objects and think of her play largely as a symbolic manifestation of her unconscious workings: her surroundings

(peers, carers, observer, objects) as representations of her internal objects and her interactions with them as play-outs of her earliest phantasies (Shuttleworth, 1997, Price and Cooper, 2012). Unconscious feelings and states of mind are powerfully present in the course of my observations similar to the therapeutic room where the child's play is thought to enact the relations of her internal objects in the light of her phantasies, wishes and fears (Rustin, 2012:14-15).

I do my young child observations with Valerie<sup>2</sup> at her nursery weekly for a year. Psychoanalytic observation becomes to me an emotional space that looks at the unconscious dynamics in a meaningful relational matrix by means of transference and countertransference. In this context I think of her play as driven by her unconscious workings (or my imaginings of her unconscious workings).

I feel that I have just found a language with which I can think about her play as influenced by her inner worlds, latent wishes and unconscious drives, and I begin to wonder about the expansive qualities of her play and to look for a language with which I can also attend to the existential nuances of her play as she takes more of the world in. Personally located in a meaningful psychoanalytic framework, the question of meaning begins to emerge as I watch her grappling with her experiences in her play.

One afternoon Valerie took a mask and a big soft dog and went over to her friend to invite her into her play. Her friend looked at the three of them for a while and returned to what she was doing. Valerie left. She stood a little further away gazing at a group of girls who were trying on different hats. She gave in, for a moment, she laughed and stopped then laughed again. One of the girls pulled the soft dog and Valerie over. Charmed, she took a few steps towards them but did not let go easily. She started laughing while leaning over the dog but stopped abruptly and said to herself: 'this is for my friend!'. She went back to her friend and gave her the mask. Her friend took it, tried it on and then put it down. Valerie asked another girl, Mary<sup>3</sup>, who was standing nearby to play with her. She did excited. They went on the dog – Mary at the front, Valerie at the back. Once settled they paused, looked down and stayed silent for a moment as if waiting for something to happen. 'I think that's us', Mary said. She smiled and her smile felt knowing. Valerie got off, went behind the dog and began to push it and pull it as if she was trying to make it move. Mary started to laugh and Valerie laughed with her. One after the other they left the dog and wandered about.

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>3</sup> Pseudonym

How do I think about Mary's and Valerie's contemplative moment? Is it deprived of Valerie's friend, imbued with her absence? I wonder in what language I could think of Valerie's and Mary's registering of what feels to be larger than themselves in the face of an absence; that which doesn't move; the pause amidst their doing. With their pause, and in it, they trouble play and expose a discontinuity and an alienation whilst becoming aware of it.

Absence or loss awakens us to the separation from our significant others as early as birth. It also awakens us to a different sense of self in space and in time, unearthing transience and aloneness and locating us in an exile in the presence of the others, that is, while being in the world and in relation with it. Along with lack of or wish for, I ponder how I can think of the child's play as expressing a growing awareness of her being in the world; how I can also view her as someone who is always already in relation to the world and who constantly becomes aware of this by means of her everyday encounters, her experiences and her life as it comes to pass. Is there space to think of the child's play - the wonderings, the choices, the happenings - as driven by will and curiosity along with lack of? Is there space to think of her curiosity and will as not driven by lack alone? In what language can I speak of these, how do I name and respond to them? How do I encompass the expansive qualities of her play as she becomes aware of herself being a part of something larger and as she starts to negotiate the existential questions that arise from such growing personal awareness?

Acknowledging the possibility of encompassing another form of understanding of Valerie's play brings me confronted with an existential challenge, that is, an insecurity with regards to how I am present with her. Does my ambivalence between psychoanalytic and existential ideas represent a resistance towards commitment and choice and ultimately towards staying with her very own experience and my not knowing?

My young child observations end and at the end of my training I look back on them to write a paper on the theme that emerged most strongly throughout. In light of me finishing my training and Valerie finishing her time at nursery I write about separation and transition only to accidentally find out a week later that - unlike what I seemed to have assumed in my initial observational arrangements - she had not finished but had another year at the nursery. I struggle to hold this in my mind, let alone to make sense of it. In the acknowledgment that loss is present with various faces in the life of a child of that age, I am left feeling guilty of having escaped Valerie in her very own experience during our encounter. Could I have done otherwise? Have I consumed her in my own struggle of separation? When is the blurred boundary between the self and the other meaningful and when does it become unproductive if not dangerous?

The main criticism of psychoanalytic observation as a research method comes from within psychoanalysis. Some contemporary psychoanalysts question the method as lacking the means for meaning to be confirmed: in psychoanalysis, interpretation is worked through by means of the client's response, something that is not applicable in psychoanalytic observation (Urwin & Sternberg, 2012:5). My training experience with this method leaves me feeling that the child does respond in a variety of ways and that psychoanalytic observation is particularly sensitized to these because it is attuned to the child's very own language: her play. Furthermore, it considers meaning in the light of the highly dynamic nature of the relationship between the child and the adult in the light of transference, counter-transference and projective identification.

My past psychoanalytic observations opened me up to the question of interpretation as it emerged in my personal experience and stage in my training in psychoanalytic observation. I thought of the child's play in relation to a latent meaning that is to be discovered by the observer as an other expert or an object that is taken in by the child, and I began to wonder how I could also think of the observer as an other person who errs, lacks or wishes and the child as a knower of her experience. Following on from that, I ponder over the blurred boundary between the child and the observer that is present in the act of interpretation and in the subjective and relational nature of meaning making in psychoanalytic observation.

## **1.2 Identification of purpose**

This present work comes from my decision to spend more time with children in order to think more about these questions. That is, to explore the existential in their everyday lives and to think about the possibility that their play is expressive of both, their inner states and their encounters with the world and its existential givens. I understand that the edges of the inner and outer world are not clearly demarcated and that the outer is always seen through the inner whilst the inner is projected in the outer: I cannot but become aware of transience as an existential given through my encounter with an other that comes and passes, revealing a sense of self located in a larger outside-ness. My purpose is not to make their boundaries clear – how can I separate the inner from the outer? It is not the experience in itself that is psychoanalytic or existential but my thinking and my language that make it so; the meaning that my words ascribe to it or else the side that they light each time. Playing with different words, I make a meaning - then another, I look at one side pretending for a while that the other is not there. Coming from a specific psychoanalytic place, my purpose is to make a space to accommodate

such play, this dialogue between a psychoanalytically informed and an existentially grounded thinking of children's play. By moving between different spaces, I also look to problematize the notion of myself as an expert and to be present with each child as an other who is subject to lacks, wishes as well as existential givens. With this research I thus look to see **how the existential is present in children's everyday life at nursery and to explore the possibility of an integrative understanding of the children's existential encounters by means of psychoanalytic observation.**

### **1.3 Outline of the thesis**

In order to respond to my research inquiry I have structured my writing into five main sections. The purpose of my thesis was shaped by my literature review, my research design, my analytic writing and, finally, the discussion of my writing against my research questions and the identification of areas for further research.

In the next chapter, I review the literature around my topic. My literature covers five areas. I review existentialism in its background, its themes and characteristics before I move on to look at how the existential has been explored in literature about children; I consider the question of the definition of the existential in both of these sections. I then discuss the existential - humanistic approach as located among the basic theories of child development. I discuss relational psychoanalysis as a strand that makes space for the existential and, finally, I review some attempts at a dialogue between psychoanalysis and existentialism, considering the usefulness of such an integrative approach.

I identify my research aim and in Chapter 3 I discuss my research questions and my research design, that is, my onto-epistemological underpinnings and the method of psychoanalytic observation before I move on to describe the place of my observations, the recruitment and consent processes, the nature and the processes of my observations. I then develop my analytic approach: I discuss writing as inquiry and thinking with theory outlining the role of writing and the ethics of theory as I revisit and stay with some of my observations all over again. I discuss ethical challenges in various places as these emerge alongside the development of my design.

In Chapter 4, I present the children in my research.

In Chapter 5, I write as an inquiry into my observations. This chapter comprises five sections, each focusing on a child and the existential as it emerged in our time together. I adopt a

kaleidoscopic approach, reliving my observations through my writing and thinking of them in the light of diverse theories, reveries, memories and associations.

In Chapter 6, I discuss my writing in the context of my initial research inquiry, that is, children's existential encounters in the context of psychoanalytic observation, and identify some themes and some spaces that emerge. I conclude by identifying my contributions and some areas for further research in Chapter 7.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In the preceding chapter, I set out the background and context of my research and my personal location in it; I identified my research aim; and I provided a brief overview of the structure of my thesis. I will now contextualise my research topic in the wider literature, looking at how it features in diverse discourses and how it is absent from others.

I begin my literature review with an overview of existentialism, its basic characteristics and some of its themes, and then I look at the existential in the literature about children. My focus lies with the existential as subjective and relational. For that, I draw specifically on education and health as two fields of childcare that are concerned with the personal and emotional relational worlds of children. I continue with a brief review of the basic theories of child development in order to locate and discuss the traces of a nascent existential-humanistic approach among them. I then look at psychoanalysis as it grew to encompass a more relational interpersonal understanding of experience that also allows for the existential encounter. I finish my review with a discussion of the work on the dialogue between existential and psychoanalytic ideas and its potential for an understanding of children's experiences in the light of their existential encounters. I conclude with a discussion of my literature review locating my inquiry against the gaps and spaces I have identified in it.

### **2.2 Existentialism**

In this section, I look to introduce existentialism. I start by grappling with the question of its definition in the light of the dynamic and embodied nature of the existential. In building a background for the existential in my research, I draw primarily on the work of Macquarrie: his discussion of themes and characteristics as well as his focus on phenomenology and narration, both of which bear some useful parallels with my inquiry and the quest for meaning.

#### **2.2.1 An attempt at definition**

Drawing on its Latin origin, to ex-sist or exist is:

to emerge or to stand out from the background as something really there. Putting it more philosophically, to exist is to stand out from nothing (Macquarrie, 1973:62)

Aside from the active feel, there is also a contextual quality in the above definition: space and time are *built in* to existence. To exist is to have a place and time in the world and to emerge from it ceaselessly. We occupy it constantly and, as we do, we also constantly stand out from it. This dynamic mobility is characteristic of human beings (among other beings) who not only 'are' but also think about their being and their becoming. Would it be then possible to talk of *going out* instead of *standing out*, that is, of an ongoing movement towards or beyond where one is at any given time, what Macquarrie (1973:69) calls 'always on the way to somewhere else'? As with existing, are we then all always engaged in existentialism?

Among the diverse approaches to existentialism as a philosophy, a school or an approach, Macquarrie chooses to think of it as a style. He identifies the absence of a common body of doctrine among all existential philosophers yet acknowledges a resemblance in its practice, that is, 'a shared style of philosophising that permits us to call them existentialists' (Macquarrie, 1973:14). Sartre speaks of the word as 'now so loosely applied to so many things that it no longer means anything at all' (Sartre, 1988:347). For Macquarrie, this is due to the elusiveness that is inherent in existentialism as consistent with the lived experience:

The advocates of this philosophy deny that reality can be neatly packaged in concepts or presented as an interlocking system ... In the existentialist view there are always loose ends. Our experience and our knowledge are always incomplete and fragmentary (Macquarrie, 1973:13)

In what follows, I attempt to trace the distinctive character of existentialism that defines it as such by unearthing it from its interests, themes and characteristics. Prior to that, I look at the common ground that existentialism shares with phenomenology and narration allowing the existential a place in relational practices in search of meaning, such as research, therapy and education.

### **2.2.2 Phenomenology and narration**

I have chosen to draw on parts of Macquarrie's overview of the wide body of work on existentialism primarily because he refrains from presenting a summative definition of existentialism. Instead, and throughout his writing, he moves between different articulations

in a descriptive manner, which reads as attuned to the existential nuancing. His writing is seen as both consistent (Ogletree, 1973) and inconsistent (Shofner, 1975) with his intention to present a phenomenological account of existentialism, yet the emergence of diverse responses to his writing can be thought as indicative of a writing that is alive to the fragmentary and incoherent nature of the topic it grapples with. Furthermore, Macquarrie confronts the interwoven threads of phenomenology and existentialism, acknowledging the phenomenological manner as inbuilt in most existentialists whilst also tracing the existential back to the first acts of narration. In other words, he discusses the existential as peopled and grounded to the everydayness of being and tightly tied to meaning presenting useful links to my inquiry.

The close relationship between phenomenology and existentialism is discussed by thinkers who acknowledge the truth of the subjective experience. Each identifies a different aspect of it: Merleau-Ponty (2005) points to the sensory perception of reality, whereas Heidegger (1988) points to time and space as inherently implicated in our subjective experience. In his literary work, Camus (1995, 2013, Fiut, 2009) suggests that our living is tied to an ongoing search for personal meaning, whereas May introduces an integrative scientific and ontological understanding of the person's experience bringing phenomenology into his psychotherapeutic practice (May, 2007, Reeves, 1977). This latter self-reflexive focus turns phenomenology into a method of observation aimed at enhancing awareness of our existential givens and a more authentic existence in the acknowledgment of our limitations and our possibilities within them (Spiegelberg, 1960). In his review of Macquarrie's work, Ogletree (1973:305) suggests that

the existential style of philosophizing appears to be phenomenological description directed to the features of experience highlighted by characteristic existential questions: questions about finitude, death, anxiety, responsibility, and understanding as these emerge in the consciousness of concrete subjects

For Heidegger (1962), phenomenology is a philosophy that is concerned with the subjective truth, the possibilities of which are bound together with the temporality of human existence in time and space. He opened up this personal philosophy to contain the less conscious parts of the subjective truth; in doing so he acknowledged the potential role of the unconscious in the lived experience.

Existentialism is centred on the person's desire for meaning, which becomes more prominent in times of change and turbulence, as they challenge our perception of our place in the world, from the cosmological revelation of infinite spaces to the imposition of physical restrictions:

The existentialist style of thought seems to emerge whenever man finds his securities threatened, when he becomes aware of the ambiguities of the world and knows the pilgrim status in it (Macquarrie, 1973:60)

Drawing on his time in a concentration camp, Frankl (1967) understood the person's search for meaning as both a motivation and a means of survival, leading to the development of logotherapy as an existential approach to therapeutic work. Macquarrie (1973) discusses narrative traces in existentialism as closely linked to the very act of meaning. A hermeneutic thread takes existentialism back to the emergence of myths and follows through to today each time the person seeks to make sense of herself in the face of limitations by means of narration, including symbolic narrative forms such as art and diverse contexts, everyday, creative or therapeutic. The very act of storying is a personal, active search for the self and embodies an existential curiosity:

Psychological accounts have drawn attention to the parallels between myths and dreams, and have seen in them projections or objectifications of man's inner desires and strivings. Existentialist accounts see in mythology man's first gropings towards an identity: to tell a story of human origins, for example, is to confess a self-understanding (Macquarrie, 1973:35)

Macquarrie (1973:37) finds in myths the human struggle with the inherent paradoxes of existence. Freedom, finitude, guilt and the quest of meaning find their symbolic expression in myths and (later on) in stories, novels, poems and plays, before they emerge from their latent mythological form to become the explicit object of critical interest and study of ancient philosophers and more recently existentialists and existential psychotherapists.

Existentialism invites the personal meaning of the individual, child and adult alike, in her everyday experience of being in the world. As such it welcomes the existential as it lives out in descriptive personal articulations, including embodied and symbolic forms. With its links to phenomenology, existentialism attends to the ordinary experience of being in its everydayness, thus allowing the construction of a background that could accommodate children's existential encounters. At the same time its narrative underpinnings make space for the existential to be thought in the light of meaning that is subjective and relational.

### **2.2.3 Characteristics**

To emphasise the dynamic generative yet incomplete nature of existentialism, Macquarrie (1973) turns his attention to the person as its agent, as that who affords existentialism its distinctive characteristics. Existentialism begins with the person that exists first, rather than thinks first, and knows by means of her very own existence. Existentialism asserts that the person thinks passionately, that is, by means of her very engagement with the actualities of existence (Macquarrie, 1973:15).

Unamuno, a Spanish existentialist says:

Philosophy is a product of the humanity of each philosopher, and each philosopher is a man of flesh and bone who addresses himself to other men of flesh and bone like himself. And, let him do what he will, he philosophizes not with the reason only, but with the will, with the feelings, with the flesh and with the bones, with the whole soul and the whole body. It is the man that philosophizes (Unamuno, 1954:26)

Some existentialists have met their method in phenomenology. With attention to description and looking inwards, the phenomenologist seeks to offer a description of that which appears or else of what is seen. Context, presupposition and interpretation are not separate from what is seen but part of it because it is made and remade continuously. Existentialists craft phenomenology to match their purposes and their interest in the existence rather than in the essence (Macquarrie, 1973, Spiegelberg, 1960). Meaning becomes the ongoing and fragmentary experience of persons as they participate in the world in the fullness of their being. One side of this is relativism: ongoing movement can give rise to ongoing questioning, a doubt that, although an inherent position in the existential thinking, if taken to its limits can be feared as nihilism; the other side brings attention to the body as the ceaselessly generative unique individual agent of meaning. In his phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty speaks of the theory of the body as already a theory of perception:

Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system. When I walk round my flat, the various aspects in which it presents itself to me could not possibly appear as views of one and the same thing if I did not know that each of them represents the flat seen from one spot or another, and if I were unaware of my own movements, and of my body as retaining its identity through the stages of those movements. I can of course take a mental bird's eye view of the flat, visualize it or draw a plan of it on paper, but in that case too I could not grasp the unity of the object without the mediation of bodily experience, for what I call a plan is only a more comprehensive perspective: it is the flat 'seen from above', and the fact that I am able to draw together in it all habitual perspectives is dependent on my knowing that one and the same

embodied subject can view successively from various positions (Merleau-Ponty, 2005: 235)

The body brings space and time to life as it is by means of our bodies that we occupy them and ultimately 'know' them. The body is also at the centre of our relational existence as it allows a sense of a separate and connecting other who gives back a sense of self. Being-in-relation is another distinctive focus of existentialism:

We have seen that it is in virtue of being and having a body that the existent is in a world. Likewise, his being-with-others is possible only through his being or having a body. I am aware of the other because I touch him, see him, hear him through the organs of sense. I communicate with him through the medium of language, but language is made possible by those bodily organs that are capable of producing the sounds of speech or that are receptors for such sounds (Macquarrie, 1973:114)

Heidegger (1962) first spoke of persons as being always already in relation with the world whereas Buber (1937) spoke of meeting the world in an I-thou relationship, where the other is acknowledged as an-other 'other' allowing back a sense of self, that is, a sense of being.

Sartre (1993:347-349) conveys this powerfully with an image that goes back to an infant encounter of otherness:

I am a pure consciousness of things (...) but all of a sudden I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me! What does this mean? ... I see myself because somebody sees me

Another characteristic of the existential is that it is met in the everyday and the ordinary, which is both 'the commonest and most fundamental mode of existence' (Macquarrie, 1973:83):

What does it mean to live or dwell in the world? Obviously such expressions mean much more than just being physically located in the world ... to live in the world is to be related to it in innumerable ways beside the spatial relation ... to be in the world is to be concerned with the world, to be engaged in ceaseless interaction with the things we find in the world (Macquarrie, 1973:83-84)

Existentialists are concerned precisely with the 'in' in the 'being-in-the-world', that is, with the innumerable ways in which the person engages with the world and exists in relation with it. This does not mean that persons meet the world as something that is independent and outside

of them and to which they later ascribe meaning. Instead, these are interwoven in the very act of looking at the world while being in it; the question of meaning is there from the beginning, inherent in the very being of the being-in-the-world, embodied in the concern that is implicated in living (Heidegger, 1962, Macquarrie, 1973).

#### **2.2.4 Themes**

As discussed earlier, existentialism attains its distinctive style through its interest in the person that exists always and already in relation with the world, with others, with space and with time confronted with the limitations of her inescapable relational bodily existence. Existentialists are attentive to a range of themes that relate with the concrete human experience in its diversity and complexity:

For the existentialist, man is never just part of the cosmos but always stands to it in a relationship of tension with possibilities of tragic conflict (Macquarrie, 1973:17)

In this relationship, the person is confronted with the problem of freedom, of choice and responsibility, with absurdity, transience, finitude, guilt, alienation, despair, aloneness. Given that space, time, body and relatedness are at the core of existential thinking, the above mentioned themes come up as givens that are inexplicably linked to our very existing. Existentialists attend to these problems as they live out in the subjective emotional experience since it is through our personal emotions that we know the world as persons-in-relation.

Relationship as a central theme in existentialism, is discussed in various manifestations by existential writers. Heidegger (1962) focuses on a worldly relatedness that is inbuilt in the space-time we occupy: in acknowledging that we are always already in relation with the world, he also encompasses the angst of nothingness as inclusive in being. Buber (1937) stays with a more interpersonal reading of relatedness and speaks of the I-Thou as opposed to an I-It relationship that gives back a sense of self being. Our relationship with the notion of god has also concerned existentialism as closely linked to the question of meaning, purpose and aloneness. In his work on nihilism, Nietzsche (1988) concerned himself with freedom from and the desire to be God, whereas Kierkegaard (2009a), a European philosopher with a religious upbringing, 'haunted by a sense of family guilt' (Macquarrie, 1973:54) returned to the theme of individuality, discussing subjectivity as that which is most true in that it involves a personal ethical relationship with life's givens by means of free will. Fromm (1961) brought

this into the realm of psychology and discussed power as negotiated in various acts or states of being such as religious conformity or authoritarianism in the light of fear of freedom.

Attention has also been given to questions of meaning from the place of emotions in literary work on angst, absurdity and alienation (Camus, 1955, 2013, Sartre, 2000) as feelings embedded in the everyday experience that bear an existential layering. For Sartre, the confrontation with life's existential givens comes with anguish yet brings authenticity. This theme runs throughout his work. Some psychotherapists have also acknowledged their patients' agonising relationship (confrontation or resistance) with existential givens such as death (Yalom, 1980), meaninglessness (May, 2007, Frankl, 1985), freedom (Bugental, 1965) and free will (Fromm, 1961), the influence that it bears on their mental health and how it shapes the roles they take on and fulfil in their lives.

As mentioned above, our being is tied to life's existential givens in our everydayness: existential concerns are concerns about our existential givens and, as such, they are a human given that is shared by all. Children are not excluded from these givens. Scalzo (2013: personal communication) suggests that existential theory offers a pluralistic view of the child; one that acknowledges an interconnected presence in the world where the child is a being-in-relation from birth.

When considering children's relationship with the existential from an adult place, however, one needs to confront one's own readiness (Silverman, 2000) to allow such relationship, to invite and stay with it or disregard it on the basis of age, cognitive and mental development or of the impulse to protect one's children, and thus oneself, from what is existentially given.

### **2.2.5 Summary**

I started the above section following existentialism with Macquarrie and with some philosophers, writers and psychotherapists who engage with it in their work. In his review, Macquarrie remains attentive to the person's search for meaning of her experience through the changing times, as it is shaped by them. I found existentialism intertwined with phenomenology and the act of narration in the search for personal meaning and the descriptive language of experience. Subjectivity lies at the centre of both, closely linked to body, relatedness and everydayness as its inherent characteristics. We exist in the world as beings with bodies, bodies in ceaseless personal relation with the world, everywhere and all the time. I presented some existential characteristics and themes as they appear in the work of existential philosophers, authors and psychotherapists who grapple with questions of meaning in their



authorial work and in their work with people. Given its dynamic nature, I do not think of the existential as exhausted in the above mentioned themes or of each existential theme as exhausted in one form. Instead, I think of it as individually coloured and personally expressed. Looking at the subjective relationship with the existential, the question that the above-mentioned philosophers, writers and psychotherapists pose involves all existing persons, children and adults alike: how do you experience your existence? What does it mean for you? I keep the question of the definition of the existential open and let it follow through to the next section where I turn to the specific literature on children and look at children's relationship with the existential, as explored by adults in the wider field of childcare.

## **2.3 The existential in children**

The present section is divided into three sections. In the first section, I continue to address the question of the definition of the existential, bringing it into the context of children. I open the existential up to its different wordings before I look at how some people who have been working with it have spoken of it. I then move on to consider the existential in the education and health literature. I have chosen to draw on these two areas because of their interest in children's subjective experiences in everyday relational contexts.

### **2.3.1 An illustration**

A study conducted in 1969 at the Alister Hardy research centre in Oxford invited 'all those who felt that their lives have in any way been affected by some power beyond themselves' to write an account of their experience (Berryman, 1990:510). In his review, Berryman notes an adult account of a moment in his childhood:

The writer still remembered the occasion after fifty years. It happened when he was about five. As he watched some ants, he realized that he was so big that the ants could not even know he was there. He was outside their knowledge, but as he turned away from his watching, he remembered, "I saw there was a tree not far away, and the sun was shining. There were clouds and blue sky that went on for ever and ever. And suddenly I was tiny — so little and weak and insignificant that it didn't really matter at all whether I existed or not" (Berryman, 1990:512)

While located in an educational and religious context, this account is a powerful recollection of a child's experience that uses everyday materials, its own making, to present itself. In line with phonetic research such account holds on to the lived experience (Flyvbjerg, 2001). This personal account, in the form of an example, allows for an experiential understanding of the existential because it invites an equally personal response through associative images. In other words, it speaks to me in a person-to-person, childhood-to-childhood or experience-to-experience relationship. I hold on to it, now, here, because with its descriptive strength it acts as an anchor that allows a movement to and from it as I begin to consider how children's relationship with the existential is looked at in literature.

### **2.3.2 More attempts at definition**

Berryman (1990) points to the scarce attention to children's interest in or indeed encounters with the existential. He exposes a widely held assumption that children do not have existential concerns primarily due to the fact that, in the context of the adult norm, their thinking is not yet developed or they lack the life experience required to engage with questions about the meaning of their existence. Further to that, there is a body of literature (Leaman, 1995, Monroe et al, 2007, Paul, 2013) that identifies a common perception of existential topics such as death as taboo areas from which children need to be protected; children are then discouraged from relevant conversations often resulting in isolation and marginalisation (Hill & Tisdall, 1997).

Yet Freud (2001a:289) says:

An unmistakable tendency to put death on one side, to eliminate it from life...the civilized man will carefully avoid speaking of such possibility in the hearing of the person under sentence. Children alone disregard this restriction; they unashamedly threaten one another with the possibility of dying

Indeed, the present project stems partly from my surprise at encountering children in my work and in my past observations playing out their grappling with - what I perceived to be - the existential and the imaginative ways in which they did so.

An attempt to define children's existential encounters or an existential nuance traced in their play comes with the need to bear in mind the impulse to think of it as a child's version of an adult prototype instead of something that can stand on its own. Such a view relies partly on the associations of the existential with the grown-up, the mature and the grave. Further to that,

the question of the definition of the existential begets the question of its nature: if an existential question is a question about life and is naturally intertwined with all life questions, how do I work on it distinctively? How do I put one name to it?

I stand in bewilderment when it comes to naming what it is I am looking to define. As an adjective, existential belongs to the noun: the noun gives it life, a body, and then narrows it down to it. In the acknowledgment that reality is constantly interwoven with imagination there are some individual qualitative differences that come with the choice of words that accompany the existential. These point to different angles, different foci and details and shape the truth or else the view that is put forward. As such, an existential question is different from an existential quality in that it acknowledges a concreteness and a definitiveness; an outsideness that is not as easily worded in existential quality and even more so in the existential nuance which feels more permissive in its subtlety. An existential awareness is attuned to the relationship with the existential which is assumed as a given. An existential moment is more whole and more real - it occupies a place in time and space and as such makes demands on reality. Yet, in the case of research, it is more encompassing of its subjects and the in-between space; it is somewhere between the self and the other.

In my review of literature, I find that people use different terms to speak of the existential and each lights a quality that I encounter in my experience with the children. I keep these qualities in mind and I read the definitions and descriptions that are unearthed in literature with them. My review thus becomes a way to explore the spaces, the edges and the boundaries of the existential whilst also attending to the ambiguity concerning its naming.

Berryman's interest in the existential as it is encountered in the surrounding and the everydayness is also found in the study of Pramling and Johansson (1995) who look for existential questions in early childhood. Children's everyday experiences trigger their thinking. Existential questions are:

the experiences children work on, express and try to understand in relation to themselves and life as such (Pramling and Johansson, 1995:126)

These touch on both the ordinary and the fundamental in their living. Existential questions are children's concerns around life and death; good and bad; choice; freedom; aloneness and togetherness. They can be expressed verbally in questions, in narratives, in stories, in conversations or be embodied in children's art, their play, their role-play and the quality of their relationships (Pramling and Johansson, 1995). They can be triggered by children's

interactions with others (their peers, a family member, a teacher, an animal), with objects or toys, seasons and events; children experience or witness a moment that triggers their wonder about its meaning in their lives.

From the perspective of psychotherapy, Scalzo (2010) speaks of existential concerns. He thinks of existentialism as the study of experience, of the making meaning of the world while being in it. An existential concern is not the experience of living in itself but a concern about the experience of living. It is inextricably linked with experience because the question of being cannot be answered through deep philosophical thinking but by being. Children are human beings who live and experience the world, relate to the world and struggle to understand it. There are certainly different parameters that qualitatively distinguish the context and the content of the lives of children from that of adults. Yet this does not take away from children's being in the world and coping with meaning: children are not deprived of existential concerns because they are not deprived of living:

Children, it seems, are categorized and objectified even further than adults. This is done by age, academic ability, medical diagnosis, behaviour, etc. Fundamentally, however, from an existential position, nothing changes. Children are still beings, actively coping with the world, trying to find their way about in the world, and with the same parameters and existential givens we must all live with (Scalzo, 2010:3)

Moustakas' (1966) thinking feels encompassing and context-less yet individually centred on experience as it becomes actualised in the existential moment:

It is this moment of awareness and discovery and presence that I call the existential moment; it is the moment when a person recognizes his own existence in the world and the unique and incomparable nature of that existence ... it may be a moment of realization of who one is, a sudden understanding of life, an awareness of the rightness of a value or conviction or decision ... or of the emptiness and futility of a life without value ... The existential moment is a moment of pure feeling, a moment of reflection and solitude, a moment of wonder, joy or grief, an experience centred in a particular self; it is my sorrow, my elation, my despair, my excitement, it is a feeling which infuses my entire being ... in such moments, the person feels his feelings; he hears his own inner dialogue; he feels his footsteps and knows them to be his own (Moustakas, 1966:9-10)

Thinking of the existential positioned in the everydayness is different from thinking of it from the place of therapy; anxiety weaves in, stays and the child is viewed as consumed by it:

In therapy, it is a moment when the child and the therapist are in full communion (ibid:9) .... The therapist never loses sight of the fact that the child is seeking in his own way, however fragmentary or futile or destructive it may appear, to find an authentic existence, to find a life of meaning and value, and to express the truth as he sees it (ibid:4-15)

What comes across from the above descriptions is not a straightforward fixed definition, rather a position towards the existential, the inward shape, the contemplative quality; the acquaintance with the existential as it comes from inside or from outside, violently or at a more quiet pace, by means of anxiety, discovery or observation of life as it happens. Sometimes a child's existential question can be identified with the child's meaning making. Their boundaries are not clear. Yalom (1980) refers to meaninglessness as a basic existential given; still, the question of meaning is acknowledged as one that embraces all existential concerns. The existential emphasis on the subjectively unique lived truth allows the assumption that all existential concerns are concerns about meaning. The child's concern about death flows from the child's concern to make a meaning of death and leads to a generative subjective meaning of death. I therefore consider meaning making to be a broad term - both a notion and an action - that refers to the ceaseless existential concern to understand the world while simultaneously living in it and relating to it. The existential is thus explored in the light of the subjective meanings made from the wider shared existential givens, including - potentially - meaninglessness. It grows from an experience of living and the meaning that it holds for the child's life.

The above discussions of the existential in children are embedded in their context and as such come with different connotations. Still, they help me to begin to trace different articulations of the existential, its boundaries and the points where it meets with and diverges from experience as well as from meaning making. I do not commit to one definition of the existential but move instead between different wordings of it in order to explore its nuances and contexts.

In the next section, I turn to look at how children's existential encounters are considered in literature. I structure this review in a compartmental manner and I look to find the existential in the fields of education and health, that is, in fields of childcare that, consistent with the nature of the existential as described above, encompass children's subjective emotional and relational worlds of meaning.

## 2.3.3 Education

### 2.3.3.1 *The existential in children's philosophy*

Children's empowerment is advocated by global and local conventions on children's rights which focus increasingly on a pedagogical framework that embraces children's expression of thoughts, their decision making and their holistic participation (Howe & Covell, 2007). The idea of a democratic classroom relies on the idea of respect and critical thinking about the self and others. Critical thinking is also found at the centre of an emergent curricular field, known as philosophy of childhood that proposes philosophy for children as a way of developing critical thinking skills in education (Vansieleghem & Kennedy, 2011). Lipman et al (1980) envisage philosophy for children from an educator's point of view, as does Matthews (1980) who grounds it in the child's inherent sense of wonder. Children's capacity to do philosophy is questioned on the basis of the argument that children lack abstract operational skills as well as sufficient life experience upon which to reflect (Kitchener, 1990). Matthews (1978) acknowledges children's cognitive-developmental context but does not view it as a limitation; such a view would suggest an underlying assumption that children's thinking is undeveloped adult thinking. Instead, he thinks of children's philosophy grounded to their own context, that is, a

natural sense of wonder about the meaning of concepts, which disappears when a person starts to take for granted the difference between the literal and the figurative use of language (Matthews, 1978:72)

Walters (2008a:278) draws on Kierkegaard who acknowledges children's vulnerability to the negative as well as their sensory sensitivity, that is, the

great powers of observation, memory for detail, his or her ability to distinguish fundamental truth from the less important

The idea of children's philosophy in the classroom has currently evolved to embody dialogues with children about their experience of interactions. This aims to enhance their reflexivity rather than to promote critical thinking or decision making *per se*; in this context, children's philosophy is an enquiry into the questions of life that lead to more questions as opposed to a

scientific method or a concrete body of knowledge (Murris, 2000, Vansielegheem & Kennedy, 2011).

In this background context, the current research looks to address not only children's own interest in questions about life as part of their ordinary experiences but also their 'delight in pondering over existential questions' (Pramling & Johansson, 1995:128).

### ***2.3.3.2 Manifestations of the existential in education***

Berryman (1990) explicitly addresses the role of adults in encompassing the existential in children. The widely held adult assumption that children do not have existential concerns results in a double bind for them: they struggle to remain true to the reality of their emerging existential questions while maintaining adults' approval (Berryman, 1990). Another block to children's existential wonderings is the assumption that adult thinking is the norm:

This infers that the thinking of childhood is undeveloped adult thinking. The further inference is that the role of education is to help nature liberate the child from such a disability (Berryman, 1990:511)

Such a view insists on the child's conscious or cognitive understanding, that is, the capacity to understand rather than on the personal meanings that children constantly make of the world in which they exist. Berryman (1990:513) exemplifies this distinction characteristically:

Death is not like a mountain, a liquid's shape, or any other object in the natural world. Of course, children notice dead creatures. The concept of death is built up from such evidence, but such knowledge only raises the existential question, Why do I have to die? When death becomes personal, it is an existential mystery rather than a fact to be described and explained by the kind of thinking that is employed by the scientific method

Berryman's discussion of children's existential questions is imbued with a powerful aliveness. His words convey images and memories and feelings – an other kind of knowing - and evoke images, memories and feelings in the reader. He writes engaged from the inside, in line with the existential. He begins his writing with his own memory, that is, his subjective experience when he was a child:

Despite the passing of five decades it is still vivid. I was four or five years old and staying with my grandmother when it happened. At bedtime I crawled up into my grandfather's bed since he was out of town. My grandmother had arthritis and walked with crutches, so when she got into her bed she did so with difficulty and turned out the light. I remember the warm dark and the ticking clock, high up on the dresser. The clean sheets sheltered me. The familiar smell of the room made me safe. I felt so alive that my skin tingled. Muscles moved for the sheer pleasure of feeling their response. I stretched. Suddenly, as if a huge door opened in front of me, there was nothing there — absolute, lightless, nothing. "Grandmother! Why do I have to die?" (Berryman, 1990:509)

Berryman (1990) acknowledges children's awareness about time and death and turns to religious language as the language that can embrace children's existential anxieties in their wholeness. Drawing on religious education his writing is a comment on teaching, primarily, as presence with no specific reference to age and context of children. Nevertheless, his initiative to convey his own existential encounters as a child exemplifies a way to encompass the existential in children from an adult perspective.

Pramling & Johansson (1995) explored children's existential questions in their everyday settings offering the first explicit account of the topic as such. They reviewed a number of untranslated studies on existential questions of children showing how the topic enjoys not only recognition but also a developing focus by the Swedish curricular education in early childhood settings while also pointing to a tension around adults' lack of commitment to engaging with children in their openness to existential questions. They explore thirteen teachers' perceptions of children's existential questions in four different day care centres in Sweden with a diversity in age, culture and class. They identify four basic themes that are not perceived to be linked with overwhelming events in children's lives but an everyday reality in the classroom: (i) life cycle, being born, living and dying including conception, sexuality, being "inside" the mother and growing up; (ii) events in the local environment/society comprising ideas about war, violence, thieves or fire, dangerous animals or nightmares; (iii) emotional, physical and moral (right or wrong) relations between human beings in family and society; and (iv) global questions, questions about events in society related to power, the story of creation and religion.

Conrad (2011) explores young people's subjective views of time drawing upon Nye's anthology entitled 'Salting in the ocean: 100 poems by young poets'. Nye worked as a visiting poet across a wide range of US schools and collected poems by children and young people between six and eighteen years old. Nye chose not to print the individual children's ages with their poems resisting the adult insistence to provide developmental explanations for children's choice of words, themes and imagery. Conrad's subsequent analysis of a selection of these



poems confronted her with various, at times contrasting, perceptions of time that were not to be reduced to a child's perspective about time. Young people's poetry revealed their capacity to engage in an exploration of time in 'dynamic temporality', a term used by Conrad to refer to young people's manipulation of time beyond the limits of their personal lives by means of their imagination.

In the light of their personal subjectification of time, Conrad (2011) points to poetry as a means of unearthing children's richly varied meanings about time in their complexity. Emery (1971) and Everhart (2002) have also pointed to creative (in their self-reflexive quality) and literary (in their fostering of narrative meaning making) practices and their capacity to accommodate children's and adolescents' existential challenges in education.

Drawing on Sartre's seriality, Blenkinsop (2012) brings in the metaphor of a bus queue to illustrate the freedom of the individual in the community and the student in the classroom. The image of people in a queue waiting for the bus conveys a 'plurality of isolation'; it brings to life memories and associations and makes me think about students' own experience of belonging in the classroom

The bus-riders are together only because of the shared knowledge of the bus schedule, the destination, and the coincidence of location. Eventually, daily repetition of the same routine, same time and same bus, turns them, in this respect, into passive recipients of life and experience, which is the defining characteristic of the series. This condition of 'being completely interchangeable' Sartre regards as a 'scandalous absurdity' (Blenkinsop, 2012:185)

Blenkinsop meets the existential embodied in the everyday organisation of students' life and draws on it to challenge personhood and transcendence in the educational context. In doing so, he questions the classroom as a space of belonging for students, which is often taken as given.

### ***2.3.3.3 The existential in relational learning***

A number of studies on education focus on teachers' own relationship with the existential speaking to the need to address their role in children's engagement with the existential given the strong relational nature of learning but also the shared confrontation with existential givens.

Schell (1968:8) discusses subjectivity in the light of Buber's I-Thou relationship and argues that 'knowing another as a person and how he knows himself to be from the inside' is a position

that a teacher needs to remain faithful to not only by communicating it and fostering it among the pupils but also by embodying it. Drawing on anguish and despair she discusses how teachers' own existential positions become present in the classroom, colouring their relationship with their pupils and problematizes over the appropriateness of conveying these to elementary school children especially in the light of Sartre's thinking of righteousness as residing in freedom of choice. Schell argues that the reciprocity of an I-Thou relationship is constricted by the child's immaturity or by the practical everyday tasks of the classroom, but views children's creative practices as another door to it.

Hunter (1993) suggests that the teacher's self-recognition that reality is experienced subjectively allows students the courage to be subjects of their own meaning. The teacher needs also to engage with the fear of freedom as a daily reality in the classroom. Despite Hunter's commitment to existence as a subjective experience it seems that, like Schell in her discussion of immaturity, his views grow against the assumption of an underlying otherness rather than grounded on children's being in the here and now:

In encouraging students to have 'the courage to be', teachers are essentially providing them with opportunities to rehearse for life's main event: adulthood (Hunter, 1993:194)

A number of authors meet the existential in the transcending possibilities of education in the light of the student-teacher reciprocity.

Reck (1982) sees teachers and students as individuals who are engaged in a relationship of mutual and ongoing self-choosing, emphasising the teacher's own existential position and their readiness to assume their freedom and responsibility. For Reck, learning is choosing to be changed, constantly becoming; his existential approach allows a personal playful and relational attitude as opposed to a view of learning as the possessing of an objective reality that is external to oneself.

With a focus on the student-teacher intersubjective relationship, Walters (2008b) brings in person-centred and existential thinking and discusses an alternative to the authoritative distant relationship as assumed in the Freudian consulting room. Walters (2008b:116) does not intend to replicate therapy in learning; rather it is the underlying qualities of the therapeutic relationship that can be brought into wider pedagogical contexts that foster change:

It is not that the classroom becomes a consulting room, rather that the transformations of 'self' or of 'being' ('Dasein') that accompany deep, relational learning are well advised to occur in both types of setting

Both existential and person centred approaches emphasise the intersubjective nature of the student-teacher relationship and the mutually giving character of their encounter:

No, to be a teacher is truly to be the learner. Instruction begins with this, that you, the teacher, learn from the learner, place yourself in what he has understood and how he has understood it, if you yourself has not understood it previously, or that you, if you have understood it, then let him examine you, as it were, so that he can be sure that you know your lesson (Kierkegaard, 2009b:46)

It means attempting to experience the [students'] world the way the [student] experiences it, but experiencing it without getting lost in it, without ever losing the 'as if' quality (Kahn, 1991:41)

In this reciprocal space there is place for insight and transformation by means of transference or through the unconscious becoming conscious, that is, through highly relational and experiential processes (Walters, 2008b:116).

McMillan (2013:3) further abides with Kierkegaard's thinking on subjectivity and asks: How can we help the student discover, define, and move forward creatively in her life-narrative, organized around what the Existentialists call her 'life-project'? To the degree that a person is out of touch with her life-project and is not continually creating an ever-richer narrative of her life, she becomes alienated. McMillan turns to existentialism to find approaches that can encourage students' authenticity. She discusses education as part of the student's life narrative that is in ongoing dialogue with the teacher's own commitment to her existential narrative. Epistemic crisis is the existential movement of the students to and from different life narratives – 'becoming', she argues, 'necessitates crisis' (McMillan, 2013:62) - and of the I-Thou student-teacher relationship as one that fosters and generates such process.

The above work addresses teachers' own relationship with the existential and how it informs the relational practice of teaching as a reciprocal experience of change and transformation. The following study is a beautiful illustration of a classroom open to encounter itself being subject to absurdity.

Renstrom (2009) writes a personal account of teaching Camus' *Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* in a class of teenagers. Her writing unearths students' readiness to engage with absurdity and with nothingness and to make meaning of it. It is imbued with an existential

nakedness - naked of an attempt or a concern to impose a meaning; perhaps this is what allows students' engagement to come alive:

'What do you mean, life has no meaning?' they ask. The emo kids smirk at each other – they've known this forever. I pose some classic existential questions: why are we here? What is our purpose in life? What are we meant to do? I tell them that Camus thinks there is no purpose or meaning for humans, that our efforts at finding meaning inevitably fail, and are thus absurd. They stare at me emptily. 'So, basically, you go with the flow', I say. In the following days, my students saunter into class after the bell, insisting it is better than rushing, or that they were too busy going with the flow to finish chapter three...

My students understand that I'm asking them to go someplace heady and strange and possibly uncomfortable. Some of them actually rub their temples. But most of them are game to see where such questions lead. Curiosity indicates trust and receptivity; a few have said that this is the most bizarre book they've ever read, that they'll keep reading if only to see how much stranger it gets (Renstrom, 2009:22)

Renstrom argues on the existential as an internal subjective experience through her own voice both in the classroom and in her writing. She addresses intersubjectivity and reciprocity solely by disclosing her experience of teaching, free from theory:

As I reread *The Stranger*, I can't help interpreting the book as a personal message from Camus about the past couple years of my life – my struggle to come to terms with the death of my father and what his death suggested about the way that the universe works (or doesn't) (Renstrom, 2009:22)

Her teaching is meeting anew with absurdity; an attempt to stay with it. Near the end, when the students are asked to enact the stranger Meursault's trial, it becomes clear that they too are engaged with the text in an existential manner in ceaseless choosing and making of meaning:

I'm frustrated that they still don't understand that Meursault acts of his own volition. I exercise judicial prerogative and ask Meursault if he thinks there's anything wrong with him. He says no. 'Do you want to change?' I ask. He shrugs and says, 'No, why would I?'. The jurors exchange glances and the defence glares at me. But in the end, even though it wasn't presented as an option, the jury finds Meursault insane and elects to send him to a facility for treatment. When the jurors explain their decision, I realize that it's not because they don't understand Camus; rather, they reject absurdism. And so do I (Renstrom, 2009:24)

The literature on the existential in education is largely focused on the student-teacher interpersonal relationship and, with the exception of Pramling and Johansson's, Conrad's and Renstrom's work, on the teacher. Of the three works that look at students' engagement with the existential, only one looks at preschool children and does so through their teachers' perceptions, revealing a lack of work on students' side. Existential approaches have begun to emerge and to inform the field of education not only through students' and teachers' existential sensitivity, but also through its relational and transformational potential. The above review points to an intersubjective turn in the educational relationship that makes demands on the existential awareness of the teacher. Ideas from psychotherapy and existentialism inform the intersubjective reality of education by acknowledging the teacher's own active and personal presence in the student-teacher relationship that fosters a reciprocal becoming. Berryman and Renstrom exemplify this in their writing, which embraces the personal voice and the inclusive use of memories and experiences. Their work invites research on younger children's existential encounters by means of a method that is inclusive of the researcher as inevitably relationally engaged with the children and with existential givens. Finally, art and literature are identified as encompassing and prompting the existential, not only in education *per se* but also in research into the existential in education.

I turn to health to explore its space for the existential: I focus primarily on outside events in the life of the child as an existential prompt and on the imprint of existential agony in mental health.

### **2.3.4 Health**

In this section I look at the existential in research on children's health. I view health as encompassing both the physical and the mental wellbeing of children. The following review is divided into three sub-sections. In the first two, I look at how existential concerns might be triggered by outside events, namely illness and trauma and in the third I explore the space of the existential in psychotherapy including the emergence of existential approaches in child therapy.

#### ***2.3.4.1 Existential encounters in the face of terminal illness***

The little work that looks at children's existential concerns in the light of illness focuses on chronic or terminal conditions. Studies (Judd, 1989, Godwin-Tuckman, 1993, Woodgate et al, 2014) that look at children's existential encounters with terminal illness are limited in relation to studies on adult patients' encounters. Moreover, research has relied primarily on adults' observations and accounts of children's existential concerns whereas younger children are often absent due to their verbal limitations, their rare attendance in psychotherapy and the parents' own need to defend against their own anxieties around death (Judd, 1989). Still, in her therapeutic work with dying children Judd (1989:29) found that, if not at a conceptual level, children are aware that there is something serious happening in their bodies, which for preschool children is conveyed through their fear of separation. Coming also from a therapeutic background, Godwin-Tuckman (1993) collected interviews, observations and the drawings of four to seven years old children in the last stages of cancer treatment and read them against developmental, existential and spiritual approaches. For some children death was concrete and definable whereas for others not; magical thinking and personal meaning was embraced as comforting and healing for the value it holds for children themselves. In their research with young (eight to seventeen years old) cancer patients, Woodgate et al (2014) found that drawings are not only a sanctuary from isolation but also a means of conveying the subtle movement between existential anxiety and existential growth in engaging with suffering. Children's diary drawings conveyed images and facilitated narratives of existential worry, existential vacuum, existential longing and existential growth.

#### ***2.3.4.2 Existential encounters in the face of displacement***

In recent years, attention has been paid to children's emotional experience of displacement. Vitus (2010), Dvir et al (2012) and Kazanjian & Choi (2013) identified the existential character of the topic and studied it further.

Vitus (2010) writes about her encounter with Sadiq, a fourteen years old boy who lives in a centre for asylum seekers with mental health problems. Taken by Sadiq's insistent aliveness over the birth and the growth of his co-habiting rabbits that disrupted a prior immobility in the centre, Vitus began to think about how children experience the waiting time for asylum. In her observations in the centre, Vitus encounters existential boredom and restlessness from always being on the move and fatigue and despair due to no imminent forthcoming. She argues that deprived of a sense of time, living is deprived of a present or a future, being or becoming, that is, de-subjectified. Dvir et al (2012) and Kazanjian & Choi (2013) discuss existential

loneliness in the life of the displaced child. The loss of home is also loss of the self. Viewing loneliness in the light of existential aloneness is a way to resist alienation, to resist reverting to conformity in order to escape the anxiety of the empty space within (Kazanjian & Choi, 2013). Both authors point to the role of the involved practitioners in that. The research of Dvir et al in a residential group care setting further acknowledges the staff's hesitance in contrast to children's readiness to discuss their lack of family ties.

#### ***2.3.4.3 Existential encounters in psychotherapy***

Children, unlike adolescents, appear only sporadically in literature on existential questions. There is a developed body of research on existential anxiety in youth and on the emergence of existential concerns and their correlation with identity and loss in the lives of adolescents (Damon et al, 2003, Berman et al, 2006, Berman et al, 2009, Shumaker, 2012). Yet Shumaker (2012) also points to the lack of research on a therapeutic integrative existential framework that can address the above documented existential anxiety in adolescence. On the contrary, attention has been given to the development of an existential approach in child therapy (Colm, 1966, Moustakas, 1966, Scalzo, 2010) with, however, a considerable lack of research on children's existential concerns.

Prior to presenting the existential approach in child therapy as discussed by each of these authors, I review some studies that consider existential themes present in the context of therapeutic work with children.

Quinn (2010) focuses on choice in existential-phenomenological psychotherapy with primary school children whereas Kitano & LeVine (1987) acknowledge the child's capacity for responsibility and decision-making as that which can inform an existential approach to child therapy: existential therapy can be extended to children through self-determination (as perceived to begin at birth), self-reflexivity, sensitivity to meaning and freedom of choice within limitations aiming at increased self-awareness and self-development. A number of doctoral theses have explored the humanistic-existential approach in therapy with children (Mottaghipour, 1982), the appropriateness of existential play therapy for middle aged children (Oppenheimer, 1988) and an existential approach to group play therapy with physically abused children (DeSouza, 2010). Extensive work has also been done on an existential approach to family therapy (Lantz, 1993, Bergantino, 1997, Lantz and Ahern, 1998, Lantz, 2001, Lantz, 2004) as well as to family work with trauma (Lantz & Gyamerah, 2002, Lantz and Raiz, 2003).

Existential analysis was born out of the acknowledgment that healing cannot come only through the internal integration of the self by means of a monologic process but through the experience of a self-and-other dynamic encounter (Colm, 1966). Binswanger's first attempt to reconcile psychoanalytic and existential insights was followed by Hanna Colm, a child psychotherapist who saw that psychoanalysis cannot eliminate the existential anxieties: the goal of therapy is to eliminate the unconscious defences that bar the self against the acknowledgment of the good and the bad within, so as to find the courage to face the existential anxieties, that is the courage to be. For Colm (1966), a child can reopen herself to the world by reopening to a person-to-person relationship moving from isolation to a genuine communion. Healing is the participation of the therapist and the child in their existential encounter; they meet as partners who

struggle with mutual trust in each other which is no longer based on the patient's expectation of perfectness, but on his newly gained realistic concept of the finiteness of every human being. Here, finally, the bipolar structure of all life is lived out in a 'we' experience (Colm, 1966:151)

In contrast to the analytic neutrality, Colm (1966) points to the significance of the gradual opening to the expression of the genuine reactions of the therapist as a non-moralistic response to one's being in the world, allowing the acceptance of the self and others 'in spite of'. She suggests that the intellectualization of emotions can cast away the pain of confronting the existential concerns but a genuine sense of relatedness comes through the will to confront human existence in its wholeness. Her existential insight in the field of psychotherapy lies in relatedness as represented in her moving from technique to interaction and encounter; children will not engage in free associations but will communicate their concerns in their play with an intuitive adult who will reflect on their meanings.

Moustakas (1966) discusses existential child therapy by means of a collection of eleven essays that come from psychotherapists of diverse backgrounds and their work with children. Instead of theoretical underpinnings, each essay looks to unearth the lived experience of the child and the therapist as it unfolds in their encounter:

The therapist living existentially with children transcends schools of thought and adheres primarily to value and to discovery of the meaning inherent in evolving life (Moustakas, 1966:11)



Apart from the therapist's commitment to curiosity, emphasis is put on the immediacy of the engagement:

The therapist is present as a real human being, feeling and experiencing with the child (ibid:14)

Each case study is a manifestation of this. In the concluding chapter of the book, Gendlin (1966) uses them to exemplify his notion of experiential psychotherapy. He highlights the rich diversity of approaches that inform the work of each therapist as well as the fact that the therapist is not tied down to them: theories are made of interplaying concepts and experiences; they do not define the experiences, instead they are defined by them:

human experiencing is approached directly rather than studied after it has been translated into theoretical machinery (Gendlin, 1966:265)

As with Colm, for Gendlin (1966:273) it is the therapeutic encounter - this interpersonal meeting - that gives this approach its distinctive character. He conveys the quality of such an encounter in an evocative manner:

We all know, for example, the concrete sense of being looked at by another human being, when someone looks *at* us. That is not what he really thinks or what we wish he would think, or how we wish he had seen us. It isn't this or that perception he may be getting. It is the live, direct sense of existing in the "reality between" ourselves and him, of being seen by him, and of meeting him in his seeing

Scalzo (2010) offers a more contemporary coherent account of an existential perspective in the therapeutic work with children. He views play as a primary way of relating that the therapist is called to respond to wholeheartedly in the fullness of her subjectivity; the child projects in her play her present way of being in the world. Therapist and child become thus

mutually engaged in inevitable intersubjectivity (Scalzo, 2010:12)

He opposes to the theoretical and scientific engagement with the child as a block to the experience of being with the child and understanding what it is for her to be in this world;

potential meanings rest in the manner of the interpretation rather than in the interpretation itself. The child's personal context can offer useful information about how she has constructed her way of being with herself and with others. Traces of it can be unearthed from the child's referral, assessment and diagnosis, as well as the family setting. Still, the therapist can genuinely encounter the child in her world if she is open to being surprised by the child.

Scalzo (2010) suggests an existential perspective in therapy with children and not a manual for existential child therapy. Psychoanalysis is a theoretical framework for the understanding of a relationship; existential psychotherapy abandons preconceived theories and aims to establish a relationship within a specific space and time. Experience, awareness, choice and responsibility begin to emerge in this dialogic relationship. Pondering on the ethical applications of self-knowledge in children, he argues that self-awareness is not to be perceived as inherently therapeutic and cathartic; rather, awareness and growth flow out of the child's experience of being in relation to the therapist and the reflective dialogic process.

### **2.3.5 Discussion**

The above review indicates a growing attention to the existential in the field of childcare. Education and psychotherapy share a common trait when it comes to their work with children; both are relational practices that grapple with meaning. With its view on learning as relational, an existential approach to education allows the space for children to engage with the existential in a relational process of meaning making. The existential focus on the subjective personal quest for meaning allows both the child and the teacher an active presence in this reciprocal relationship. Similarly, the role of the therapist in an existential approach is far from fixed or pre-determined. Both the child and the therapist participate in an interpersonal process of meaning making while being mutually subject to existential givens.

All the above studies, with the exception of Pramling and Johansson (1995), involve primarily school-age children, that is, children that have the capacity to rely largely on language in their everyday lives. They are also based on adult teachers' and therapists' accounts and views of the existential in children's lives or as an appropriate approach to education or therapy. Yet, within those adult accounts, some voices (and some more than others) acknowledge the personal and relational involvement in looking at children's subjective experience. These are voices that are transparent about their existential encounter from an adult location. Berryman (1990) and Renstrom (2009) involve themselves actively in their study, each in their own way: Berryman by means of a reverie to a moment of existential anguish in his own childhood and

Renstrom by revealing her own existential agony as it emerges in her encounter with her students. In doing so, and in the light of the aforementioned adult resistance to stay with children's existential encounters, they point to a way to begin to attune to these from the place of the adult self. Such personal attunement is at the centre of an existential approach in child therapy. The child and the therapist meet each other subject to shared existential givens and engage in a dialogic process of meaning making. Language (through choice) and experience (through being in relation to each other) are at the centre of it, more so than a theory.

In the next section I explore the existential approach in child development in more detail but prior to that I briefly review the basic child developmental theories in their earliest form given that they inform educational and therapeutic discourses. With this review I do not intend to offer a comprehensive presentation of child developmental theories as this is not pertinent to the aim of my research; rather my focus lies with the space they afford to children's existential encounters. I review them briefly in order to locate among them the existential-humanistic approaches that are borne out from the acknowledgment of children's existential presence in the world.

## **2.4 Child development**

There seem to be signs traced in literature of some dialogue between existentialism and child development either by means of explicit attempts on behalf of practitioners in the humanistic field or through philosophical writings about children that are existentially coloured. I discuss an emerging existential humanistic approach to child development before I present some existential themes in the writing of people who think about or work with children from a place of existential sensitivity and alertness. In doing so, I consider how existential encounters are present in children's lives asking for a pertinent attention.

### **2.4.1 Basic theories**

Child development is commonly discussed against a background of five main theoretical approaches, namely the psychoanalytic (Freud, 2001b), cognitive (Piaget, 1936), psychosocial (Erikson, 1977), behavioural (Skinner, 1948) and ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Each of these theories grows from its focus on a specific area, aspect or capacity of the child that is considered fundamental in her development. Early psychoanalytic theories unearth the

unconscious as a region that is outside immediate awareness yet fuels our behaviour by means of deep inner workings, fears and wishes that grow partly from sources of pleasure located in the body. Cognitive theories point to the child's conscious thinking and understanding of the world based on her cognitive development which is age and, therefore, stage determined. Although it too builds on stages, the psychosocial theory acknowledges the child as an individual who negotiates her sense of self as located in the world and interpersonally related to others. Behavioural and social learning theories place emphasis on observation and learning, suggesting that our growing exposure to external environmental stimuli shapes our behaviour. Finally, ecological theories adopt a socio-cultural view of development that emphasize the child's spatial encounters with the world (Santrock, 1996, Cole & Cole, 1989).

Freud developed his theory of personality based on his child development theory opening up to a view of childhood as richly significant in one's life (Mercer, 2003), yet his psychosexual thinking on development omits the personal context of the child and has received gender-based and culture-based criticism from feminist psychoanalytic strands.

On the other hand, a sole insistence on cognition enhances a self-enclosed and self-confirming view of development that screens out the possibility of an interpersonal meeting with the world, that is, of the possibility to affect and to be affected, to change and be changed, to transform and be transformed reciprocally. Burman (1994) challenges developmentally driven constructions of child development; deprived of a social context those models run the risk of becoming theory centred. Her focus in this regard is on education but her thinking helps me to think of the child's knowing of the world whilst being in it, that is, the child's onto-epistemology:

The failure to see child development as socially constructed rather than biologically unfolding leads to an ignorance of the ways the models reinscribe particular moral values ... What Piaget and the other theorists who inspired 'child-centred' approaches to education share is a commitment to this view of knowledge as arising outside social structures and relations ... It is this model of learning, as a separate, isolated activity, that sets up the continuities with the current instrumentalist orientations through a conceptual transition from knowledge as process to knowledge as the exercise of techniques (Burman, 1994:173-175)

Deprived of personal context, these models bring with them ethical risks as they allow for social pathologies; injustices and inequalities in the name of child-centredness and control in the name of empowerment (Burman, 1994).

The psychosexual and cognitive theories of development point to a kind of experience in the world that leaves the world largely outside the picture. The child's experience depends on, and is narrowed to, pathways located in the child's body (cognition or drive) that appear to be outside her control and to stand separately from her lived experience. Together with the psychosocial, they are stage-centred theories and build on the basis of an assumed developmental linearity that runs either in the early years or throughout the lifespan. The behavioural and ecological approaches differ in that they do not fit growth into stages; while they view the child in its wider social context they do not address the meaning that the child makes of it.

The above basic theories of child development build on a linear successive form that is largely age-oriented. With the exception of the early psychoanalytic and psychosocial theories that acknowledge the child's relational experience albeit from a developmental framework, the rest theories focus on epistemology, that is, on how the child perceives or knows the world. In doing so, they do not attend to the subjective experience of the child, that is, her meaning of the world as well as her relationship to it. What follows is a review of an existential-humanistic attention to child development as set out in the work of both practitioners and existential thinkers.

#### **2.4.2 Humanistic-Existential approaches**

Charlotte Buhler is a German psychologist who concerned herself with a humanistic-existential approach to child development. Her thinking did not emerge from her therapeutic work but from observations of infants and children during their day-to-day activities and their play as well as from her collection of interviews and adolescent diaries that she used as autobiographical reflections of their searches (Buhler, 1951). Buhler's writings are, largely, inaccessible and untranslated yet DeRobertis (2006) pieced them together and identified an existential-humanistic contribution to child development. Buhler became interested in the holistic view of the human being in contrast to the psychoanalytic, cognitive-behavioural and developmental conceptualizations that reduce the child solely or separately to each: her unconscious libidinal drives, her environment and her reactions to it. Despite the identification of some humanistic elements in the psychoanalytic humanism of self-psychology, Buhler identified the absence of a theory that focuses on the self as an active agent of meaning (DeRobertis, 2006).

### **2.4.2.1 Choice**

Buhler maintains that the origins of selfhood, a primary individuality and creativeness are present in the infant who is actively engaged in seeking and creating meaning by means of personal pursuits and significant relationships: the infant's primary need is physical satisfaction, which is actively responded to by means of the infant's selective perception to facilitate feeding. Similarly, infants are observed to engage in a pursuit with a toy or a person in a manner that is intentional and results in new relational potentials (DeRobertis, 2006). Buhler suggested an existential humanistic framework that identifies an inherent lifelong striving for food and love, security and belonging, expression and authorship and unity (DeRobertis, 2006);

It is a developmental theory of motivation based on the study of the individual's dynamic relationship to his environment (Buhler, 1951:323)

Buhler's interest in the exercise of and will to meaning brings her humanism closer to the existential search for meaning than to the path towards self-actualization as described in humanistic theories:

She used the term self-fulfilment to refer to self-actualized living that is simultaneously characterized by tendencies toward reality-transcendence (i.e., intentionality, the need to live for something) (DeRobertis, 2006:58)

Selfhood is one of the main concerns in DeRobertis' approach. Rather than separate, he sees the self as always already in relation to the world even before the emergence of a reflective or conscious awareness of such relatedness. 'The self', says DeRobertis (2008:9), 'is not a little person inside the big person';

An existential-humanistic approach to child development is holistic in that a child is never looked upon as the mere sum of diverse interacting parts. Experience and action are looked upon as inextricably intertwined and inherently organized, so much so that isolating subdivisions of the child's development always begins and ends with a proper recognition of the whole child. The word self is often employed to emphasize the holistic dimension of development. The concept of selfhood highlights the ontological priority of the whole child over any part or system of parts throughout his or her development. Holism further denotes the inherently worldly and contextual nature of development. Each child develops in a unique, situated, worldly milieu. Development can only be adequately

understood when context is taken into account. This context includes (but is not limited to) the child's body, culture, language, education, family structure, social relations, time and place in history, and personal history. Thus, generalizations alone cannot suffice for an adequate understanding of child development. An existential-humanistic approach to child development must, therefore, remain an open-ended theory, perpetually in dialogue with evolving research in the field of developmental psychology. To this end, phenomenological research is particularly valued due to the inherently open-ended nature of its method (DeRobertis, 2011:6)

Like Buhler, DeRobertis (2011) acknowledges motivation as a core theme in an approach that views the child as active in her becoming rather than passive recipient of processes occurring outside or inside her. For DeRobertis, however, motivation does not aim towards equilibrium; instead, it encompasses tensions as inherently involved in an interpersonal relationship with the world. Finally, DeRobertis' approach to personal agency is grounded in the present; even though the past is acknowledged as an essential part of the present existence, DeRobertis does not stay with it *per se* but with the child's interpretations of it in the present.

#### **2.4.2.2 Death - Aliveness**

Death is a distinctive existential concern that is not adequately addressed by the humanistic approach. DeRobertis (2011) identifies the possibility of a dialogue with some humanistic strands that acknowledge an interpersonal and dialogical quality in meaning making drawing on philosophers of intersubjectivity. Such ontological ground (always, already related with) has capacity for death as an existential given that although we do not know it evokes in us fear or despair; as such it cannot be left outside child development:

The challenge of human development is to make life meaningful and fulfilling in a world that is not completely our own doing and which harbours threats to our being. This is evident across the lifespan, from the awareness of vulnerability felt in infancy to the articulated fears of death that manifest in old age (DeRobertis, 2011:7)

Almost two decades earlier, Vandenberg (1991) spoke of death as a human concern that cannot be addressed solely by epistemological takes on development:

Epistemological uncertainty is reduced as cognitive structures become more stable and adaptive, leading to a scientific understanding of death. The existential

perspective, by contrast, argues that the meaning of death encompasses more than its logical properties. The exclusive focus on the adult-scientific concept of death makes death commonplace and categorical, thereby draining it of the anxiety and existential significance that we experience when we confront the reality of our own personal death. Because we care about our life, our impending death carries considerable anguish and anxiety. Death is more than a question of knowing; it is an issue of being, and its significance extends beyond epistemological concerns (Vandenberg, 1991:1279)

Children are not excluded from this agonising struggle with death:

One of the primary tasks of development is the ongoing effort to cope with the anxiety associated with death and annihilation. This does not mean that young children have a mature understanding of the concept of death; rather, their apprehension of death is rooted in early, primitive anxiety and fear responses that are present prior to a conceptual appreciation of the term. Just as conceptual understanding of the term separation is not necessary for it to be operative in development, so, too, the lack of a conceptual appreciation of death does not preclude its influence. In fact, it has been argued that separation anxiety may be accurately understood as an early form of death anxiety (Vandenberg, 1991:1279)

Yalom (1980) identifies adult bias, language and the scientific work on the capacity for abstract thinking as impediments to knowing more about children's thoughts on death. Still, in between no understanding and conceptual understanding of death, the child remains in relationship with it:

...a 3 and one half year old boy who for several months had been asking his parents when he or they would die. He was heard to mutter that he himself would not die. Then his grandfather died (this grandfather lived in a distant city and was barely known to the child). The child began having frequent nightmares and regularly delayed going to sleep; he apparently equated going to sleep and death. He asked whether it hurt to die, and commented that he was afraid to die. His play indicated a preoccupation with illness, death killing and being killed. Though it is difficult to know with assurance what 'death' means to the inner world of the preoperational child, it seemed that this child associated it with considerable anxiety: death meant being put in the sewer, being hurt, disappearing, vanishing down the drain, rotting in the graveyard (Yalom, 1980:86)

Yalom (1980) thinks of the fear of separation as the only 'language' available to the child by means of which death anxiety can be expressed. For him the reason that death is largely excluded from the psychodynamics is because it is equated with separation. Yalom (1980:102) identifies a central paradox in such equation: if the young child at the preoperational stage cannot experience death anxiety because she does not yet have a sense of self that is separate



from the surrounding objects, how can she have a concept of separation and experience separation anxiety? Klein speaks of the dread of annihilation as emerging from the fear of loss of the infant's object but, for Yalom (1980) the most essential fear is that of the loss of the self; fear of the loss of the object comes down to that as it poses a threat to one's own survival.

Alongside death, Vandenberg (1991) identifies aliveness - that is the felt awareness of being thrown into the world, alive to and confronted with the question of its meaning - as a second existential given that exposes the limitations of a sole epistemological understanding of development:

How do we explain the randomness and wonder of finding ourselves alive? Why are we here? What happens when we die? These questions have shadowed people of all cultures, in all epochs. They are not epistemological queries or puzzles, but are existential questions or laments. They arise because we are beings who are concerned about the nature of our existence. Our concern about being is necessarily and inexorably entwined with concern about our nonbeing, with our death (Vandenberg, 1991:1278)

The intertwining edges between psychoanalysis and existentialism are revealed in the face of the givens of aliveness and finitude. Our attachments to others provide a secure base to manage life's inherent uncertainty. This is met early on in the infants' attempts to attune to their caregivers and to evoke their attunement:

This poignant struggle in infancy is paradigmatic of the human situation, confronted as we are by existential uncertainty and by having to establish some sense of security in the world (Vandenberg, 1991:1282)

One of de Beauvoir's contributions to existentialism is her inquiry into the question of freedom in the face of relatedness as this dates back into our early years:

the nursling lives directly the basic drama of every existent: that of his relation to the Other (Beauvoir, 1988:296)

#### ***2.4.2.3 Being-in-relation***

We exist in an ongoing interplay between the need of the other and the freedom from the other, an inescapable relatedness in which we relate to an other in order to attain a sense of self; I cannot but emerge gradually out of the other's gaze (Beauvoir, 1988, Scholz, 2010). Weaning signifies the end of oneness and the beginning of the alienation from the self:

the child commences towards the age of six months to mimic his parents, and under their gaze to regard himself as an object. He is already an autonomous subject, in transcendence towards the outer world; but he encounters himself only in a projected world ... the magic of the adult gaze is capricious. The child pretends to be invisible; his parents enter into the game trying blindly to find him and laughing; but all at once they say: 'you're getting tiresome, you are not invisible at all'. The child has amused them with a bright saying; he repeats it, and this time they shrug their shoulders (Beauvoir, 1988:298)

The child cannot give up her projected image as it is a promise of a future: it is inextricably tied to her becoming. For Scholz (2010:402) 'the child is taught to desire to be by playing at being';

In his universe of definite and substantial things, beneath the sovereign eyes of grown-up persons, he thinks that he too has being in a definite and substantial way. He is a good little boy or a scamp; he enjoys being it ... later on he too will become a big imposing statue. While waiting, he plays at being, at being a saint, a hero, a guttersnipe. He feels himself like those models whose images are sketched out in his books in broad, unequivocal strokes: explorer, brigand, sister of charity. This game of being serious can take on such an importance in the child's life that he himself actually becomes serious (Beauvoir 1948:36)

Stern's view of the self feels less static: instead of an isolate entity, he speaks of layers of self that are not separate from each other, nor do they replace one another as successive phases:

Once formed, each sense of self remains fully functioning and active throughout life. All continue to grow and coexist (Stern, 1985:11)

Caston (2015) finds in Stern's theory an approach to child development that takes into account the child's subjective and intersubjective presence and as such does not rely on categorical or linear structures. The absence of a theory that is grounded in the experience of the child results in 'clinical sterility' (Caston, 2015:95). Like DeRobertis, Caston (2015) finds an allying theory in existentialism:

existentialist theory prioritizes the relational nature of existence and is therefore better placed than most to explore the effect of the environment (surely the only reliable, meaningful window into a child's subjective experience) on an infant who is unable to express himself in any other way than through his burgeoning relationships with those charged with his care ... the phenomenological position is that the infant comprehends the world and himself through the behaviour of others-in relation-to-him (irrespective of whether he, in those first few months, is capable of perceiving such things as 'self' and 'others' (Caston, 2015:96-99)

An existential-phenomenological approach is particularly useful for looking not only into the infant's pre-verbal experiences of the world but also the relational understanding of existential givens on behalf of children who are, in Piagetian terms, at a pre-operational stage (Caston, 2015). Its aim is to stay as close as possible to the 'rich, concrete textures of individual existences' and to

an empathic, imaginative sense of what it is like to live as a developing child – a deepened sentiment about, and understanding of, the child's unfolding life (Briod, 1989:120)

Consistent with its ontological position such an approach allows for a reciprocal knowing and unknowing of the other: the thought of the mother as being available for the infant to observe (Caston, 2015:99) allows the infant the capacity to leave an imprint on the other.

### **2.4.3 Summary**

I discussed a recently emerging existential-humanistic approach to child development in the context of the basic theories of child development. Although some of these grapple with the child's experience in the world they do not address the child's existential relationship with the world as always personally implicated in it irrespective of her age. A number of people have been interested in an approach to child development that encompasses the child's existential presence in the world. As seen above, this relies largely on humanistic and phenomenological discourses and their focus on agency and meaning. Choice, death and being-in-relation are existential themes that are unearthed in the work of writers with an interest in the existential in children.

The above review points to an emerging awareness of the presence of the existential in childhood in various forms. It also points to attempts made to trace existential threads in

psychoanalytic strands, that is, attempts at a dialogue between the inner and the outer world of the child in her personal relationship with the existential givens. They come to add to studies on the dialogue between psychoanalysis and existentialism, some of which was made possible by a relational psychoanalytic turn that grew to encompass relationships alongside drives. In what follows, I will review these but prior to that I will discuss relational psychoanalysis as that psychoanalytic strand that accommodates an exploration of children's existential encounters.

## **2.5 Relational psychoanalytic strands**

### **2.5.1 Introduction**

The relationship between the mother and the infant is central in the psychoanalytic thinking informing the emergence of distinctive psychoanalytic approaches towards relatedness. It also informs different approaches in psychotherapy and in research, since the mother-infant couple is viewed as the prototype for later pairs including the therapeutic or the research pair. In his last book, Freud (1949:56) spoke of the mother as 'unique, without parallel, established, unalterably for a whole lifetime as the first and strongest love-object and as the prototype of all later love relations'. Since then, the mother has emerged from an object to a person, making space for an interpersonal self-other ontological position.

### **2.5.2 Relationships**

Early psychoanalytic theories were followed by psychoanalytic strands where the mother began to emerge as a person from her object role and the infant from her instinctual impulses meeting each other interpersonally. Winnicott (1958a) adds reciprocity to the mother-infant relationship and notices not only the impact of the mother and her care to her baby's life but also of the baby to her. In doing so, he acknowledges both a subjective presence in an interpersonal encounter. Placing subjectivity at the centre of his work, Stern (1985:3) asks:

How do infants experience the social events of 'being with' an other? How is 'being with' someone remembered, or forgotten, or represented mentally?

For Stern, infants have a sense of self even before language. It derives from their experience of time, space and agency by means of their sense of a continuity in time, a surrounding physical cohesion and their personal agency within this. In those preverbal, pre-self-reflective stages the infant acquires a sense of self through her being in and in relation to the world (Stern, 1985:6). Still, the sense of a subjective self emerges relationally when the infant begins to become aware of the existence of other minds around her that can hold her, that is, in relationship with her first significant others.

In relational psychoanalysis, the infant is born with a relational instinct or else with the drive to relate to another in a subject-subject instead of a subject-object relationship (Stern, 1985). With its move from instincts to persons and relationships, relational psychoanalysis holds on to theory less, encompassing more of the experience. Stern (1985) points to insistence to theory as depriving the encounter with another person of its real tensions, the dissonances and the fragmentariness of the lived experience that is often rounded to fit it. With their focus on development and growth, child development theories forget the child's very own subjective experience of herself and of others in the present.

Taken to therapy, Mitchell (1993) identifies the intrinsic role of the analyst in this relational shift as well as its onto-epistemological implications in the use of psychoanalysis outside the clinical room and in psychosocial research. He asks: what does the analyst know? The question of the analyst's knowledge itself signifies a crisis in the analyst's role as well as in the role of theory. Mitchell (1993) recognizes a psychoanalytic heterogeneity in response to this crisis and turns to philosophy to consider this ontological shift. He identifies a phenomenological and a hermeneutical turn in the practice of psychoanalysis: a phenomenological approach acknowledges the relative and perspectival reality of both the analyst and the patient, views the patient as expert in their lives and focuses on the analyst's capacity to consider the patient's subjective experience; a hermeneutic stance holds that the analytic method is an organization of meanings of reality which is inevitably shaped by both the patient and the analyst; the analyst's history - including her theory - is, thus, central in the co-construction of meaning. In its movement between phenomenology and hermeneutics, relational psychoanalysis is acknowledged as an inter-subjective process wherein the analyst imagines rather than knows, and as a co-construction of meaning wherein the analyst's interpretation is seen as an inevitable communication of her subjectivity (Aron, 1992, Mitchell, 1993, Orange et al, 1997). Some psychoanalysts responded to this ontological turn with the idea of a relational knowing that is founded on interpersonal unconscious communication, a form of countertransference

dreaming based on Bion's reverie (1962) and on Winnicott's (2012) maternal preoccupation with her baby (Bollas, 1997, Ogden, 1999, Ferro, 2002, Baranger & Baranger 2008).

Child psychotherapists with a relational interest began to work towards the development of child relational psychotherapy through an integration of the British object relations theory and the interpersonal theory for children (Altman et al, 2002, Altman, 2004). Personal history and individual context become central as the child grows out of her immature ego and her object-seeking phantasies to the individual who is always in relationship with the external world. Relational psychoanalysis - like the mother-infant dyad - is:

a two-person field as comprised of not only an overt interaction but also the internal worlds and inner experiences, conscious and unconscious, of both participants (Altman et al, 2002:9)

Taken to work with children such position informs the current practice of child psychotherapy that is driven by the pursuit of a meaningful interpersonal engagement rather than by theory alone. Children's play is seen as inherently ambiguous; the focus is on the child's creativity, the experience of spontaneous play with the other or in the presence of another, and on interpretation as meaningful when reached by the child (Horne, 2006).

The ontological position of relational psychoanalysis allows to explore the existential in dialogue with the child's both inner and outer worlds. The importance of a model that neither reduces the psychic to the social nor the social to the psychic but recognizes the person in all her complexity is also stressed by feminist psychoanalytic strands that attend to persons as subjects rather than objects (Layton, 2007:2-3). Stern's acknowledgment of the person as a being-in-relation from birth and of the self as emerging always in relation to others is consistent with the existential position on experience as relational. Furthermore, with its emphasis on the interpersonal reciprocity, relational psychoanalysis helps to explore the existential in the light of a shared confrontation with the existential givens.

In the next section, I look at the dialogue between the two schools of thought, the points of convergence and divergence, and the potential usefulness in bringing them together in order to encompass more of the child's experience.

## 2.6 Psychoanalysis and existentialism

Existentialism consists of a set of philosophical approaches that are interested in persons' experience of being in the world whereas psychoanalysis draws on a set of theories of development and psychotherapeutic approaches that take into consideration parts of the self that are outside conscious awareness. Both sides have made attempts at moving towards a more complete understanding of the individual.

Sartre's (2014) existential psychoanalysis looks at responsibility and freedom in the light of determinism. His thinking is shaped by existential philosophy, phenomenology and a critique of Freudian determinism as opposed to the existence of limitless meanings. Jones (2001:369) writes:

Sartre (1988) proposed that empirical psychoanalysis and existential psychoanalysis both search for fundamental attitudes that could not be expressed by simple or logical definitions because they are before logic. Empirical psychoanalysis is a means through which to find the complex, a word that refers to any phenomena that determines attitudes ... Existential psychoanalysis on the other hand attempts to detect the original choice, which functions in a situation described by Sartre as in-the-face-of-the-world

Both schools of thought are closely linked to the historical and the relational. Existential psychoanalysis departs from what Sartre calls empirical psychoanalysis based on the latter's insistence on the unconscious. Sartre uses the word 'project' as both a verb and noun to denote the movement towards the future given that we are always implicated in an inescapable act of choosing in place of the unconscious that looks backwards and returns us to the past (Jones, 2001). In Sartre's existential psychoanalysis, the unconscious is consciousness outside awareness:

Existential psychoanalysis rejects the hypothesis of the unconscious; it makes the psychic act coextensive with consciousness but the fundamental project is fully experienced by the subject and hence wholly conscious, that certainly does not mean that by the same token it is known by him; quite the contrary (Sartre, 1993:728)

Sartre's existential psychoanalysis was followed by more attempts at a marriage between the two schools of thought, moving towards, what Jones (2001:369) calls, 'a socio-psychoanalysis of the human existence'. Boss (2001) applied existential ideas into his psychiatric work. He

suggested Dasein (being there) analysis as a kind of existential analysis and facilitated a series of seminars with Heidegger that he later published. Apart from Heidegger's talks, the Zollikon seminars (2001) include the conversations and letters exchanged between the two men. Yalom too (1980) brought in ideas from existential philosophy to inform his analytic work with people who brought into therapy their concerns about existence. Yalom identified death, meaninglessness, aloneness and freedom as those existential concerns that were insistently present in his patients' narratives. A more explicit marriage of psychoanalytic and existential thinking is found in Laing's (1965) work with psychiatric patients and in Stolorow's (2011, 2012) work with trauma.

Laing and Stolorow have turned to existentialism to understand the lives of their adult patients; Laing (1965), a Scottish psychiatrist in the latter half of 20th century, turned to existential phenomenology to find a language that could contain the person with schizophrenia in her experience of herself in the world, that is, her own being-in-the-world. Stolorow, a theorist of intersubjectivity and practising psychoanalyst in US, speaks of 'phenomenological contextualism' as a psychoanalytic perspective that arises from the dialogue between existentialism and psychoanalysis. He draws on Heidegger's existential anxiety as constitutive in being to understand the anxiety of the trauma. Emotional trauma brings one confronted with the feeling of an abrupt interruption of a previously held continuity of being as well as of being at home in the world (Stolorow, 2012:442). For Stolorow (2011), it is the realization of our shared finitude (in being, in therapy) that can provide a relational home wherein emotional trauma can meet some meaning and find relief.

Hunt (1989) notices the potential of an existential psychoanalytic informed methodology in the field of research. Like hermeneutic existential phenomenology, existential psychoanalytic research is concerned with the lived experience informed by the person's history but goes a step further to include the intrapsychic imprints of an experience. On the other hand, existentialism can contribute to existential psychoanalytic research its commitment to the rawness of the actual lived experience:

Existentialist field workers recognise that the research process is far less orderly than is depicted in traditional sociological accounts. Events are often unexpected, irrational and spontaneous (Hunt, 1989:21)

Deeply situated in subjectivity both approaches, existential phenomenological and psychoanalytic, challenge more dualistic positivist approaches to research. Existential psychoanalytic research acknowledges the research field made of:



a series of encounters in which both subject and object change and new intersubjective realities emerge (Hunt, 1989:24)

Although Hunt acknowledges the possibility of a reciprocal change suggesting an interpersonal interaction, she retreats to the subject-object binary to denote the active participation of persons involved in the research. Is such retreat subject to the language of psychoanalysis and could it be informed by the more recent interpersonal turn taken by some psychoanalysts?

Jones (2001) opens up to a potential critique of the approach's reliance on the researcher's subjectivity acknowledging the method's limitations:

the researcher mediates the inquiry and this has important methodological implications. The mental, intellectual and emotional experience of the researcher negotiates between cultural phenomena and the psychological worlds of the informants and so, ultimately, it is the researcher's subjective understanding that gives narratives their structure

Despite work on integrating the two schools of thought on the understanding of the human experience little has been done to address how such dialogue can specifically inform the understanding of children's experiences. Is this gap expressive of a view that human experience is encompassing both child and adult experience and there is therefore no need for a distinctive focus on the children? Or does it equate human experience with adult experience leaving the presence of the existential in children's everyday lives unacknowledged?

A dialogue between existentialist ideas and psychoanalysis can inform a fuller understanding of the child as someone who is in a personal as well as existential relationship with the world. The child's familial relationships are most prominent given that the child is largely dependent on her significant others. This, however, does not take away from the child's agency in the world or the child's confrontation with the existential givens.

The onto-epistemological position of relational psychoanalysis makes way for the child to be-in-relation from birth. Since the existential givens are bound to the child's being in the world and implicated in her relationship with the world, this view also allows for the child to be in a relationship with the existential givens, even at a pre-operational or pre-verbal stage by means of her experience of being in the world. The child's meaning of the world is informed by her development, history and cognition but the child does not cease to be in a relationship with it.

A single psychoanalytic view of the child's existential concerns considers these in the light of the child's first experiences of oneness and separation and her struggle with these. An existential phenomenological approach uses the language of description to stay with the child in her being in the world in the moment and with what this means to her.

Both approaches are highly relational yet in different manners and both are concerned with the child's subjective meanings. From an existential phenomenological approach, we relate to each other on the basis of our shared existential givens whereas from a psychoanalytic approach, we relate to each other on the basis of our shared subjective histories. While acknowledging that both approaches look at the personal meaning subject to something larger (the unconscious or the existentially given), in the existential phenomenological approach meaning draws upon and goes beyond the personal context whereas in relational psychoanalysis it is worked through by means of its deep contextual embeddedness. In the former, meaning is communicated in choices and narratives, whereas in the latter it is largely conveyed by means of transference and countertransference. A dialogue between the two schools of thought allows children's existential concerns to unfold in their ambiguity and their richness. It can address the child's wider existential negotiations as these are embedded in the child's personal and sociocultural context. With its onto-epistemological turn, relational psychoanalysis allows psychoanalysis to be used as a method of research into the psychosocial. Consistent with the existential ontological position of meaning making as an ongoing relational and subjective process, I use psychoanalytic observation and rely on transference and countertransference as tools that allow me to explore the existential through my relationship with the children. I look at how an interpersonal take on countertransference can help me explore the existential in children reciprocally by attending to our shared existential givens as they emerge in the context of our relationship in the observations.

## **2.7 Discussion**

In this chapter, I have looked at how the existential is addressed in literature. I started my review with existentialism tracing connections with storying and with phenomenology in their reflexive urge to be attentive to and make meaning of the lived experience. I discussed its characteristics and presented some of the themes that have been the attention of philosophical, literary and therapeutic writings. I have explored different definitions of the existential in different disciplines and located myself at a place of fluidity that can allow me to move between the existential qualities and nuances as these emerge in my writing of my encounters

with the children. Still, in this study, I use the word ‘encounters’ to denote the relational quality of the existential as deriving from the basic existential position of being always, already in relation (Heidegger, 1962) as opposed to questions or concerns that point to a more cognitive or therapeutic approach, both of which exceed the scope and the method of the present research.

I proceeded with a review of the existential in literature on children’s education and health. I chose those specific areas because of their attention to subjective, emotional and relational processes. I have specifically focused on teaching and psychotherapy as those areas that are concerned with being and making meaning in the context of relationships. Research in these fields - especially in the area of education - has identified the relational and reciprocal nature of the existential but has not embraced it in its methodology. Furthermore, there is a lack of research on children’s existential encounters in their early years.

I turned to child development to explore its capacity to consider children’s existential presence in the world as a field that informs educational and health discourses and practices. I focused on an emerging humanistic existential approach to child development that draws predominantly on the child’s relational presence in the world before I moved to review modern relational psychoanalytic strands. From such relational places psychoanalysis opens up to encompass the child’s existential presence and encounters with existential givens. I concluded by looking at the work on the dialogue between psychoanalytic and existential ideas.

What comes from my review is a growing focus on children’s existential encounters on behalf of adults and a lack of work on children’s own existential encounters in their everyday lives. There is also lack of research on preschool children’s existential encounters. My work looks to contribute to these gaps.

I have identified an emerging dialogue between existential and psychoanalytic ideas in the understanding of human experience that was initiated by both sides:

Existentialist ideas are regarded as philosophical attitudes, more than empirically proven theories, and have influenced phenomenology, some post-Freudian psychoanalysis, and existential analysis (Jones, 2001:368)

However, there is a lack of work on how this dialogue can inform children’s experiences in the light of their existential encounters. Drawing on psychoanalytic observations I look to trace preschool children’s existential encounters in their everyday lives and to think of them from a dialogical position - moving between the small and the large, the inner and the outer – in order

to encompass more of the child's experience. This work looks, thus, to explore the possibility of an integrative understanding of children's existential encounters by embodying it.

Drawing on the gaps and spaces identified in the literature review I embark on this research in search of preschool children's existential encounters and ask: how are those encounters present in the course of their everyday lives at the nursery, in their play and their encounters? Drawing on the subjective and the relational as inherent in both the existential and in meaning making, how do I consider them integratively from a place between psychoanalysis and existentialism, the self and the other?

In what follows I discuss my questions in more detail before I go on to explain the method in which I look to approach them. I present my research design and I focus on psychoanalytic observation as my chosen method. I develop a relational onto-epistemological ground for my method, based on some relational psychoanalytic theories, and a post-structural ground for my analysis, based on some feminist writings. Both of these help me to be more inclusive of children's existential encounters in their relationality and reciprocity as well as more aware and reflexive of my inescapable subjectivity as that which shapes - both creating and limiting - meaning in my research.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

### **3.1 Research questions**

As identified in the literature review, past research in childhood has looked at the existential either from the place of healthcare in children's encounters with physical illness, displacement and emotional difficulties or from that of education on behalf of educators. It has drawn predominantly on adults' - parents', teachers' or practitioners' - views and less on children's own encounters with the existential. One study (Pramling & Johansson, 1995) looked at preschool children's existential questions as perceived by their nursery teachers. Most research has relied on language as the predominant source of knowing. With the present research, I look at preschool children's everyday existential encounters drawing on their play, their encounters as well as the relational dynamics in the course of the observations.

Following on from my training experience in psychoanalytic observation, when the child's relationship with the existential began to emerge in my thinking during my observations of a young child's play at her nursery, I look to stay longer with it in this research. In doing so, I look to explore preschool children's relationship with the existential as this is played out in their everydayness, that is, to look at some of the moments where the child is always, already in relation with the world and its existential givens. My interest lies more with the subjective meanings and the affective qualities of this relationship: how is this relationship present in the child's play and her ordinary doing? Does it come alive in a word, an object, an image, a movement, an encounter? How does it reveal itself in the child's relationships with others including myself as someone who arrived in search of it? I use psychoanalytic observation as a methodology that focuses on the child's interior worlds as they unfold in her play and in the relationship with the observer, but by bringing it into this study I inquire into the space that some of the psychoanalytic thinking has for preschool children's existential encounters and explore the possibility of an integrative approach towards them, by moving between existential-phenomenological and psychoanalytic ideas.

In the following section, I develop my research design. Given that my method is tied to psychoanalytic theory, I revisit its onto-epistemology in order to discuss how I can use it in the present research into children's existential encounters. I thus engage with my ontology as an inquiry into it. I discuss the wider epistemological and methodological underpinnings of my method before focusing in on the details: the processes of my observations, the context,

the decisions I made at each stage and the ethical challenges pertaining to these. I proceed to a discussion of my analytic process before moving on to present the children.

### **3.2 In search of an ontological home**

The present research comes largely from my interest in exploring what began to emerge for me near the end of my previous psychoanalytic observations of children's everyday play, but did not know how to stay with. I began to encounter the existential in children's play, that is, their confrontation with the existential givens in their growing experience of the world as they have just moved from home to the nursery and from their early relationships with their significant others to a wider circle of encounters. I did so in the context of a theoretically informed method that was attentive to the child's unconscious workings, desires, impulses and anxieties. Personally located in a richly meaningful psychoanalytic context, I was torn as to how I could address, and even more name, what I perceived to be existential in its quality; is it representative of the child's growing awareness of her being in the world or is it reminiscent of an unconscious wish to return to a past oneness? Is it an expansion or a regression? Does one cancel the other out?

My research question points to a reality that is both inner and outer. I am interested in children's play as it is shaped by both, their inner and their outer realities, their unconscious wishes and fears as well as their growing encounters with the outside worlds. I am interested in the dialogue between the two as it manifests itself in the child's play. How the unconscious shapes the existential and how the confrontation with the existential awakes the unconscious. What do they do to each other in the light of their ceaseless interaction?

My research question also points to a reality that is both individual and relational. I acknowledge the other, the child, the child's play as something real occurring in the outside world, however in the moment of our meeting it becomes a reality that cannot but be subjectively coloured. It becomes a reality in my eyes inevitably *through* my eyes, informed by that with which I arrive at it. The child's play as I observe it and think of it does not exist outside of me. It is a reality that comes together by the meeting of the child and myself: the child's play is not the child's alone because I am present and my presence influences the child's play; and my thinking about the child's play is not my thinking alone but is coloured by the child's actual play in our encounter. It is, thus, a reality in between the child and myself.

Frosh (2003:1564) says:

The idea of the psycho-social subject as a meeting point of inner and outer forces, something constructed yet constructing, a power-using subject which is also subject to power, is a difficult subject to theorize

Psychosocial research looks to encompass the way in which the psychological, social and cultural are intertwined in the expression of our lives as well as in our perception and exploration of our lives (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). The reflexive researcher is at the centre of psychosocial research, addressing reality as a relational project in which she arrives in her wholeness, including her unconscious or that of which she is less aware:

Psychosocial research can be seen as a cluster of methodologies which point towards a distinct position, that of researching beneath the surface and beyond the purely discursive. In other words, to consider the unconscious communications, dynamics, and defences that exist in the research environment. This may entail the analysis of group dynamics, observation and the co-construction of the research environment by researcher and researched: we are all participants in the process. From this we derive the idea of the reflexive researcher, where we are engaged in sustained self-reflection on our methods and practice, on our emotional involvement in the research, and on the affective relationship between ourselves and the researched (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009:3)

The researcher's role in psychosocial research is informed by Bion's notion of negative capability, that is, the capacity to stay with the acknowledgment that reality resides in in-between spaces, with uncertainty, with questions and with meanings in flux (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). Furthermore, psychosocial research asks the researcher to be open to being impacted by the very process of research. It uses the psychoanalytic tools of transference and countertransference to unearth such impact.

It draws on psychoanalysis to research the in-between, the middle space between inner and outer reality that exists between the self and other.

What are its ontological underpinnings, given that it draws from clinical psychoanalytic theory?

### **3.2.1 Relational informing**

In Klein's theory of the development, the mother and the infant relate to each other in a subject-object relationship. Taken to research outside the psychoanalytic training and into social sciences, such a position brings in an ontological difficulty with regards to the claims it makes

on reality, knowledge and meaning. Taken in solely as an object, the researcher is deprived of her subjective presence, her history, her expectations, her fears and her own phantasies when she is with the child, becoming a detached object that remains unaffected by the reality as it is formed in that relational space between the child and the observer. They then do not meet each other in all their complexity - including their unconscious workings - but in a largely subject-object relationship: the child as subject to her instincts and the observer at the receiving end of her projections. Enriched by more recent interpersonal readings of transference and countertransference (Bollas, 1997, Ogden, 1999, Ferro, 2002, Baranger & Baranger 2008, Brown, 2010), and of interpretation (Aron, 1992, Mitchell, 1993, Orange et al, 1997), psychoanalytic observation allows for the context to be explored as inherently present in researching the child's internal worlds by means of a relationship: the observer uses her body, her history and her unconscious to imagine the child's body, history and unconscious. Meeting each other reciprocally allows both the child and the observer to be present more fully as objects of phantasies but also agents of meaning, as subject to unconscious wishes as well as existential givens. There is thus more room for some tension, ambiguity and fluidity, consistent with the ontological incomplete reality not only of subjectivity but also of the existential.

In her psychosocial research, Hollway (2008, 2009, 2011) does not depart from psychoanalysis but draws on psychoanalytic theory to make an argument for a relational ontology.

Hollway (2008) suggests that the research subjects allow each other a sense of self. Her thinking is based on the prototype of the mother-infant dyad and Winnicott's notion that there is no infant without a mother, a self without an other:

the infant begins to organise a sense of self within the psyche-soma of its mother. This development of self is intersubjective: from early omnipotence to the capacity for concern and its expression through reparative action. The mother is ruthlessly used as an extension of itself. This is bound to change her (Hollway, 2008:5)

She draws further parallels between the mother-infant dyad, the analytic pair and the research couple by drawing on the idea of the mother-infant relationship as 'paradigmatically characteristic of the dialectical relationship between individuality and intersubjectivity which characterises all post-infant subjectivity' co-existing in an ongoing tension (Hollway, 2008:6)

It is specifically the psychoanalytic thinking of subjective reality as residing in the inner and the less conscious, as well as its attention to the analyst's subjective affective experience as a door to the experience of the analysand, that has useful implications for qualitative



psychosocial research. To speak of this in-between space (between the inner and the outer, the self and the other) Hollway (2008:5) draws on Ogden's idea of the analytic third:

I have brought this out of the clinical situation and used it to think about subjectivity in dynamic movement as a result of the recurrent unconscious identification of the subject with another, which continuously creates a third intersubjective space which potentially transforms that subject

The capacity to identify with another person's inner states allows an embodied knowing or an imagining of the other's experience. It is a relational way of knowing that rests on experience; as such it exposes the dynamic and often conflicting nature of subjectivity. Hollway's (2009:4) psychoanalytically informed methodologies:

are based on an ontology - a way of understanding people - that emphasises the effects of affect, dynamic conflict, unconscious intersubjective processes and embodied practices on the formation of identity (...) there are two grounds for believing that a psychoanalytically informed paradigm can enrich psycho-social research methods; epistemological and ontological. Epistemologically the paradigm can help the use of researcher subjectivity as an instrument of knowing. Ontologically it can inform an understanding of participant subjectivity. Of course these two reasons are intimately lined because a psychoanalytic emphasis on unconscious dynamic intersubjectivity ensures that the focus of both epistemology and ontology is on the affective traffic within relationships, be it the relationship between researcher and researched or those of participants in their life world, past, present and anticipated future

The relational ontology that underpins some psychoanalytic methodologies bears similarities with existential phenomenology in that they both suggest that subjective experience is always in relation with or else subject to the other, and so they look to get closer to it by considering that relational self-other space. Each with their focus sheds a different light on the subjective experience.

The existential plea 'Don't think, look!' points to existential phenomenology less as a discourse or a theoretical perspective and more as a relationship *per se* (Scalzo, 2010:138). The self not only seeks to understand the other by attending their relationship but attending is already an understanding because it is the self's inescapable immediate experience, it is an asking while being in relation to the other or else *by* the very being in relation to the other: what do I see? How does seeing feel like? How does seeing this feel? How does being here, with the whole of myself, with this person feel? Active engagement and subjective implication are at the heart of existential phenomenology, together with language, which is the means that

allows us to disclose, to construct, to question, to acknowledge, to disturb, to change, to interpret, to deny, to explain, that is, to assume some choice and some separateness from the other. A psychoanalytically informed relational ontology adds to this the parts of the self that are less conscious: it considers the intersubjective space as this is imbued with the self's affective, unconscious, unarticulated experience in the presence of the other as a way to understand the other's affective, unconscious, unarticulated aspects of their experience of being in the world. A relational psychoanalytic ontology suggests thus that with us, in our encounters, our unconscious life is also always already in relation with each other.

Is relational psychoanalytic theory an adequate ontological position for my research? Or do I need a philosophical home, one that was made to encompass being and knowing in a wider exploratory manner without being tied to psychotherapeutic purposes? Does relational psychoanalytic theory make its own ontological propositions based on phenomenological meaning making? With its relational underpinnings, is it more attuned to the reality of being with another in research?

### **3.2.2 Feminist informing**

In her drawing on relational psychoanalysis, and especially the idea of the analytic third, Hollway helps me to bring psychoanalytic observation into the exploration of children's existential encounters. Hollway's ontological position is particularly helpful in allowing me to tune into the inner-outer, self-other in-between spaces of the psychosocial that speak to the specific nature of the existential. Yet as I began to meet, dream and remember other personal spaces, times and people that exceed the space, time and people of the observation but emerge in their context, and to grapple with their meaning for my research question I was in need of a way of thinking that apart from in-betweenness encompasses also reciprocity and fluidity.

My methodology freed up when I encountered the writings of Jackson, Mazzei, St. Pierre and Richardson, whose work is informed by post-structural deconstructive feminist thinking (Olesen, 2011). Drawing on Barad (2007), Jackson and Mazzei (2013) speak of 'being' in flux, whereas St. Pierre and Jackson (2014:716-717) draw on Derrida's (1974) epistemology and Deleuze & Guattari's (1987) ontology of the unstable and becoming world to speak of meaning as fluid, fragmentary, relational and ongoing.

For the purpose of acknowledging the role of the self and its interrelation with the other in this research, I speak of selves as two separate entities (the child's and mine), as something that is carried with and brought to and known through an other. That is, as something that exists

already. But how do I know it exists already if I can only know it for the first time through its encounter with an other? Does it come to the surface as something that existed before our encounter or does it come to life as something that becomes in our encounter?

Jackson and Mazzei (2013:266) trouble the notion of the self, they break open the 'I' of the researcher and the researched and attend to the multiple entangled elements that it is made of:

Do we still believe in the subject? Yes, and no. We do not adhere to the liberal humanist subject that is an individual person or self. We do try to understand the historical constitution of subjectivity and the entangled production of agency that occurs in the process of intra-action as described by Karen Barad ... The 'intra-action' that characterized our process was made of reconsidering the mutual constitution of meaning as happening in-between researcher/researched; data/theory; and inside/outside

What of this web of intertwining elements/subjectivities/identities can be known, cannot be known in isolation. It can be known temporarily, locally and in relation with. I can have some sense of them as they unfold when they encounter an other, in the specific time and space that this encounter happens. What I bring is not only brought to but made with. Such making is an alive, active and interactive process, a matter of generation rather than of adaptation. There is, a web of identities, spaces, times that arrive at my arrival and are re-made in each encounter with each child. Equally, there is a web of identities, spaces, times that arrive with each child, they are made in an encounter with me and re-made in the next one. Instead of assuming a fixed self or selves (mine as the (child) researcher or the adult, or the child's as the researched or the child-in-relation-to-the-adult) that adapt to the other's fixed self or selves, I think of my encounters with each child as individual, alive, interactive processes that do something to us - perhaps make us. It might therefore be the case that the makings of my meanings and the stories about the children are themselves tools and guides into us and the making of us. Such ontological position suggests that the child or myself is not something fixed but we are made and remade in each encounter with each other, that we are constantly becoming, participating in a mutual becoming by means of each other:

If the 'I' of the participant is always becoming in the process of telling, so too the 'I' of the researcher is always becoming in the process of researching, listening and writing (...) we do not seek more reflexivity that reveals more about the researcher's ways of knowing. We seek to unsettle the 'I' of both the researcher and the researched who is a static and singular subject (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012:10)

In their search for a kind of inquiry that resists de-contextualization, St.Pierre & Jackson (2014) speak of an onto-epistemology wherein the researcher and the researched are subject to a perpetual becoming which comes to unsettle their perceived identities. Brought into my study, this thinking challenges the notion of both the knowing adult researcher and the pure child. It challenges the inescapable subjectivity of the researcher with the inescapable subjectivity of the researched and relieves the dualistic guilt of doing to or going in or getting from by introducing making with or indeed mutually becoming. It goes on to unsettle perceived notions of childhood as fixed and the child as someone to whom the world happens.

Informed by post-structural feminist thinking, an onto-epistemology that acknowledges reciprocal becoming liberates me to bring into my methodology other psychoanalytic readings of the in-between space or else the analytic third that also point to a mutual, 'healing' attention and attunement in the analytic pair (Ferro, 2002). Taken to research, such reciprocity allows it to be seen as a space of change for both subjects.

Furthermore, post-structural feminist thinking allows me to play with psychoanalytic theories as subjectivities (I read Ferro, who reads Ogden, who rereads Bion's theory of dreaming) and as possibilities rather than view them as interpretative bulwarks that pin life down to one or the other. Apart from drawing on different psychoanalytic ideas, it also helps me to bring together psychoanalytic and existential thinking in a kind of a kaleidoscopic exploration that generates rather than unearths meanings.

Grappling with the question of what makes one thing and not another count as data as well as when and where analysis happens, St.Pierre & Jackson (2014:717) turn to Derrida's epistemology that acknowledges meaning as unstable and sometimes unable to be contained in language. Their thinking allows me to include as my 'data' personal notes, reflections, dreams and memories that exceed the observational space and time, happening outside the nursery and emerging prior to or long after the end of my fieldwork.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, my experience of the above-mentioned feminist writings changed the writing of my observations, making them more fluid in comparison to my earlier observational writing. I return to feminist thinking later in this chapter where I discuss how it informed my analytic work. Yet, in the wider context of my research, I think of it as a philosophical home; a second ontological trajectory which alongside relational psychoanalysis helped me address my question and encompass my research process more fully.

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<sup>4</sup> I return to this in Section 3.7 where I present my analytic approach.

### 3.3 Epistemology

Following from her relational ontology, Hollway brings the intersubjective dynamics of the mother-infant couple into her thinking about epistemology and draws specifically on Bion's learning from experience to inform her thinking. Knowing by means of one's own experience places subjectivity at the centre of the researcher's activity as her core instrument of knowing (Hollway, 2008:9). Unpacking the researcher's subjectivity in the pattern of the mother's, knowing comes from identification with the subject of the research or in Kleinian language with the object. When the mother feels her infant's needs, she takes in her infant in his or her state and identifies with the infant as the infant experiences that state. Containment is a form of psychic thinking that allows the infant a sense of a separate self as it 'gradually introduces him back to himself' (Hinshelwood, 1991:298). This is how, says Hollway (2008:7),

intersubjectivity is at the core of all subjectivity – more or less overlaid by the separation processes that are central to the development of a differentiated self

She goes on:

The container-contained relation provides an explanation for the affective development of our capacity for thought and it does so, not from the perspective of a unitary rational subject, but through unconscious, intersubjective dynamics, initially in the relation of mother and infant, where the mother functions as a container and the baby's projections are contained. This kind of unconscious intersubjectivity continues throughout life as we learn to use other containers (and parts of ourselves) to help us to think. Links between the containing mind and its content are of three kinds: love, hate and the wish to know (L, H and K). The same goes for research. The resulting principle is that we, as researchers, are exploring methods that draw on our whole selves - our subjectivities - as the research instrument. I understand these responses through the concept of identification (Hollway, 2008:9)

For Hollway (2008:7) identifying with an other, that is, feeling her feelings, moves in a spectrum between Klein's idea of complete merging with the other, a losing of the boundaries and of the sense of where one ends and the other begins, and separateness, which is what allows identification to take place, as Hinshelwood understands it:

The simple recognition of a similarity with some other external object that is recognised as having its own separate existence is a sophisticated achievement (Hinshelwood, 1991:319)

Viewing this from the perspective of the infant, that is, her capacity to look for an other who will take in her projections, lights up the relational aspect of the process of projective identification. Among the psychoanalysts who have taken a relational turn in their thinking, Braucher (2000) sees projective identification as a call for a relationship whereas Bollas (1979) speaks of allowing ourselves to be transformed by our encounters with our objects as a capacity with developmental rather than regressive qualities. Mitchell (1993:142) suggests that:

this kind of 'regressive' experience consists of a kind of constructive disintegration, in which the ordinary contours of self experience become less guarded and more permeable, allowing an opening to and eventual integration of less controlled forms of experience not possible before, such as fusion and surrender (...) Once again, regression seems an ill-chosen term for such experiences, which are not a return to anything as much as a reclaiming of lost potentials, not a retreat but an expansion

Bollas (2007) further recognizes the recipient other of the projections as an other person and not only as an other object created in phantasy. Brought in to research, such a view allows the interpersonal relationship between myself as a researcher and the child to become reciprocal: the child too will potentially introduce me back to my self. This seems to depend less on the containing capacity of the child and more on my capacity as a researcher to contain our relationship reflexively and to unearth my own projections to the child:

The concept of projective identification is often used to explain how the self can identify empathically with the other. This of Hamlet. We can become Hamlet mentally because we project ourselves into his character (Bollas, 2007:65)

Such a take on projective identification ties research to a mutual knowing of each other in the research couple. The mother's capacity to identify with her infant, depends on her own infant experience which re-awakes in mothering and in being at the receiving end of her baby's projected needs and mental states. Likewise, my research with children awakens me to my own childhood, my memories, my experience, my phantasies and my affective states, which allow me to tune into the child's own experience, phantasies and affective states and, thus, allow some knowing of them.

Knowledge is thus resting in an intermediate area between phantasy and reality, what Winnicott (2005) calls transitional space. Knowledge lies in between the reality of my being with others in the specific time and space and what I subjectively make of this reality, which is inescapably influenced by my history, my aims and my phantasies. This intermediate area is a third area that connects the outer and the inner reality by means of experience (Winnicott, 2005). Winnicott's transitional space cuts across the binary of the objective-outer and subjective-inner reality as it is only by means of experiencing that I get in touch with the external reality, and in experiencing I bring out all of me including my inner reality. In the current research both the children and myself are occupying a transitional space, each tuning into an area between phantasy and reality, children in their play and myself in playing with their play.

### **3.4 Methodology**

#### **3.4.1 Psychoanalytic observation**

Psychoanalytic observation is one among many methods of inquiry into the development of children. As part of the psychoanalytic training it consists of:

observations of infants and their mothers or other caregivers, in natural settings, usually the home, conducted on a regular basis, preferably for an hour in each week for the first two years of an infant's life. The procedure requires the writing-up of each observational session in terms which are as literal and descriptive as possible, with subsequent reflections on the observations taking place in a seminar group consisting of an experienced supervisor and some fellow-observers, preferably only five or so. The main purpose of this reflection is to identify and clarify the psychoanalytic significance of the situation observed, including the subjective experience of the observer (Rustin, 2006:3)

Its distinctive contribution lies in its focus on the emotional intensity and complexity of the child's relationships, its sensitivity to the child's bodily pre-verbal communication and its interpretive take which draws on transference and countertransference (Brown, 2006, Rustin, 2006). Its aim is to foster a developed sensitivity to primitive, pre-verbal emotional communication by means of reverie, the ability to tolerate anxiety, uncertainty, discomfort, helplessness and bombardment, as well as the ability to observe and test a hypothesis over time (Rustin, 1989:20-21). Brown (2006) adds to that a relational element of the method as:

a longitudinal study that tests one's capacities to hold or contain a relationship over time and observe its dynamics (Brown, 2006:188)

Psychoanalytic observation is informed by object relations theory and specifically by Klein's theoretical framework: it is a 'total situation' wherein the surrounding subjects can be thought of symbolically and can be reflected upon as external representations of the child's internal unconscious objects (Price and Cooper, 2012). The child's play is seen as a symbolic manifestation of her unconscious workings; the child's surroundings (peers, carers, observers, toys) become representations of the child's internal objects and the child's interactions with them are play outs of the child's earliest phantasies (Shuttleworth, 1997). Psychoanalytic observation is a way of looking and thinking that allows a window into the child's internal world, her emotions, her fears and her phantasies as these are informed by her unconscious workings.

Underpinned by relational psychoanalytic ontology (as discussed above at section 3.2.1), psychoanalytic observation acknowledges the observer as an emotionally active presence in the observations: her countertransference, that is, her own emerging experience in the presence of the child, is used as a tool in order to begin to imagine the child's transference, that is, the child's inner experience in relation to the observer. It can be given further consideration in the light of the observer's own transference as well as of the research question and whether it carries something of the question embodied in it.

This sort of relational communication is not limited to the observational space; it happens all the time and throughout our life as we communicate our inner states by evoking strong emotions in others in our encounters. Countertransference and projective identification facilitate an experiential understanding, an emotional attunement to the other's internal workings, before an intellectual understanding is reached (Jervis, 2009). According to Rizq (2008:40):

The use of a psychoanalytic framework is not intended to pathologise or co-opt the researcher-participant relationship in any way; rather, it is intended to draw attention to the fact that it *is* a relationship and that, as in psychoanalysis, this relationship necessarily and primarily involves a complex intersubjective interplay of conscious and unconscious dynamics



In this context, the researcher's feelings - in the form of countertransference - are used as a form of data and as a reflexive tool that allows the researcher to begin to imagine the experience of the other.

Drawing on my onto-epistemological underpinnings, I have chosen to explore the existential in children by means of psychoanalytic observation because I am interested in exploring their experience with the existential, their relationship with it and the personal emotional aspects of this encounter as these emerge in the context of the research relationship and through my eyes. In the next section, I discuss those places where psychoanalytic observation meets the existential by means of its particular attention to them, making it an appropriate method for my research question. Finally, I discuss play as a manner of symbolic expression and creative exploration for both children and adults alike as well as a potential space between phantasy and reality that I draw upon to imagine the children's meanings.

#### ***3.4.1.1 The unconscious***

Like psychotherapeutic methods, infant observation 'offers theoretical and practical means to explore, and reflect upon, areas of consciousness that generally remain hidden from our everyday awareness' (Bingley, 2003:342) yet are inextricably implicated in our everyday encounters. Informed by object relations theory it is particularly sensitised to the children's unconscious workings invested by their desires and their phantasies about them. It allows, thus, some access not only to the child's affective responses to her encounters with the existential but also to her phantasies about it, that is, not only how she feels but also what she imagines about it.

#### ***3.4.1.2 The mundane***

Thinking of the existential as something that is not separate from the being-in-the-world I find that psychoanalytic observation is attuned to that being state as it is met in its everydayness. Although there are times when we are existentially challenged more forcefully, we are always subject to existential givens by means of our very existence. I am interested to encounter children's relationship with the existential in the mundane by being part of it. Quinn (2010) asks if it is moral to invite a child to consider life in an existential manner at a developmental stage when cultural integration and social belonging are significant, and points to children's

innate existential understanding. The current research employs a method that does not initiate a child's active engagement with existential questions but attends the child's lived experience and observes the emergence of existential questions in the child's everydayness. Unlike with methods that rely more on language, the observer - by her own being-in-the-room, always already in relation with the child - does not ask for meaning but tunes in without introducing a pause in the going on being, or an intermediate symbolic space made by language. Certainly presence is in itself an asking but a kind of asking that, if it is assumed as the core method as in the case of observation, is responded to with another presence. If we are always already existentially implicated in the world by means of our very own being, then we encounter the existential in the fullness of our being, that is, in every way we are present in the world: mentally, emotionally, unconsciously, through our senses, our bodies, our genders, our cultures, the space and the time we occupy. I find that in its relational underpinnings psychoanalytic observation stays with the child's experience of being-in-the room while shedding enough light on the embodied and the unarticulated whereas feminist thinking affords experience with its personal characteristics and the meaning of the mundane its raw, fluid and incoherent nature.

#### ***3.4.1.3 The pre-verbal***

I think that the attention that psychoanalytic observation gives to the embodiment of unarticulated emotional states is attuned not only to the child's state but also to the often unarticulated embodied qualities of the existential that go beyond description. The latter has been especially evident for me in my struggle to define the existential, to research it or to write about it, without feeling that I am simultaneously pinning it down or escaping it overall. There is a primitive quality about it that feels reduced by language. Infant observation allows me to look for it as it is embodied; it also allows me to meet it in a word, perhaps not in the word *per se* but in its accompanying qualities, such as the tone of voice, in repetition, in the silence that follows or an accompanying movement;

It is a paradox, perhaps best captured in music (or tones of voice), that it is sounds and silence that link us to our earlier states of being. Our parents may have spoken words to us as babies, but they were not words to us (Phillips, 1998:49)

It is also my interest in the child's unconscious and emotional responses to the existential that makes infant observation appropriate. These are responses that are not yet made conscious

through language or that we are less conscious of and thus less capable at expressing through language, but are embodied in the child's play or communicated somatically by means of transference and projective identification. In infant observation, the observer's struggle with the inarticulate is attuned to the infant struggle with pre-verbal, pre-symbolised affective states. The struggle with words is present not only in preschool children but also in me, with English being my second language. The attention to pre-verbal embodied states afforded by psychoanalytic observation speaks both to my presence in the nursery as an adult as well as someone who speaks in a second language:

but if the adults inevitably teach the children to talk, the children teach (or remind) the adults what it is not to be able to speak (Phillips, 1998:40)

My choice of psychoanalytic observation might also therefore be a retreat from my verbal insufficiency and an overreliance to emotional or mental intensity, a reversion to regressed states of oneness, a phantasy of closeness and motherhood, or another chance to revisit earlier stages and to risk being changed by it:

Anyone who lives or works with small children knows how evocative linguistic incompetence is; how inventive, how surprising, how exasperating, how frustrating it is. Indeed, our relationship to children of this formative age – how we manage and respond to the ways in which they unsurely speak to us and each other – is one picture of our relationship to our pre- and virtually linguistic selves. These children take us back to that border in ourselves where we struggle or delight to articulate against powerful external and internal resistances. And the complementary risk is that adults unwittingly use young children to reinforce a sense of their own competence ... every time we speak, and perhaps every time we have difficulty speaking – and so get a glimpse of what our fluency conceals – we are connected unconsciously with that period when we started speaking (Phillips, 1998:47-48)

#### **3.4.1.4 Play**

Psychoanalytic observation is particularly attuned to those embodied preverbal or inarticulate states because it tunes into children's play. I open up play to encompass children's wider being at the nursery and their encounters with their peers and their teachers alongside their activities. Winnicott (2005) speaks of play as a potential space in which the child can move between her phantasies and reality and bring together her inner and outer objects and worlds. It is a space

that is invested with imagination: children can play out their fears, try out their phantasies, stretch boundaries and test limits - theirs and others and both their responses to it – and project their desires and destructive wishes. It thus becomes a space where children's existential encounters can be found embodied or enacted:

Winnicott's concept of transitional space opens out ideas about imagination, developed first as a way of understanding children's capacities for creative play and how these mental capacities are fundamental to creativity in adults too... Creativity emerges in the intermediate area of experience to which inner reality and external life both contribute. It is based on imagination which enables humans to apprehend something 'as if' (as if it might be different from now). This capacity is basic to symbolisation because symbols always involve changing – re-presenting – an object. Reality and imagination work in tandem. (Hollway, 2011:51-52)

In potential space, the child can experience and enjoy a daydream-like, unintegrated state (Bingley, 2003) in the presence of an external or an internalised holding other. In psychoanalytic observation, the observer often takes the role of the containing other whose holding, consistent and returning attention allows the child the internal space to engage in creative play.

The notion of potential space can also inform the observer's own space in the processing of the observational material. In the context of the child-observer-supervisor continuum, I can think of my writing as a transitional space; a place where I can play with the images that the children give me in the presence and the holding attention of my supervisors whom I returned each month to find still there. Epistemologically, the idea of potential space opens up the space for a kind of knowing that is far from neat, fixed or linear. It allows the observer to dream the child's play and imagine her imaginings, thus meaning to reside in between phantasy and reality, and encompasses meaning as consisting not only by the child's subjectivity but also by the observer's and the supervisors' as they come together and dialogue with each other both consciously and unconsciously. As such, it is not something static but mutable and ever changing.

## **3.5 Observations**

### **3.5.1 Introduction**

The development of my research design is informed by my epistemology; still, deciding on the practical aspects of my method has not been straightforward or fixed as a process. Some of my planning evolved or changed in the course of my observations and by my very being in the nursery and in a relationship with the children. Occupying such space confronted me with the unpredictable and the unstable in qualitative research that looks to address the day to day, mundane experience of people (Flyvbjerg, 2001), the reality that is far from fixed but - consistent with the human in living and being - always becoming (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012). I became personally involved in this space while at the same time the space itself involved me in a manner that I had not and could not have predicted and asked me to take decisions while being in it and in interaction with it. Consequently, some of my choices adapted to the reality of my observations while some remained the same and others were shaped by my encounters with the children, as well as the adults, after entering the nursery. In the upcoming section, I discuss those decisions that formed my research design, namely decisions about participants, space and time, that is, the children, the nursery and the times of my observations as well as decisions about consent, participation, the processes of my observation as they developed distinct from ethnographic or participant observation, my work with the adults and my use of the self.

### **3.5.2 A note on ethics**

In addition to the ethics of consent, I have found that questions of ethics have been implicitly present and influential in each decision I made. Each choice cannot but draw on my personal ethics, that is, how I think about what I am doing. In his writing about ethics, Foucault (2005) speaks of the relationship one has to oneself when one acts. Consistent with his thinking of the reality as non-fixed and of the self as non-autonomous but implicated in experiences of power and truth, Foucault brings reflexivity into the picture. He discusses ethics not as a set of moral principles or rules but as an attitude, an ongoing problematizing and questioning of who I am, what I do, where I am in and how do I relate with my self and others while I am implicated in each of these acts or states of being (Flyvbjerg, 2001, Huijer, 1999).

The researcher's use of subjectivity as a tool in psychoanalytic observation gives rise to ethical questions related to power and interpretation (Hollway, 2008). As a theoretically informed method, psychoanalytic observation relies largely on theoretical assumptions for its interpretations. It also relies heavily on the self through its attention to emotional inarticulate and unarticulated processes since long parts of an observation can be deprived of a verbal

interaction. What is, then, the space for the other and their experience? The ethical safeguards are found within the psychoanalytic method *per se*. In recognising that the inevitable use of the researcher's subjectivity involves itself unarticulated, unprocessed, unconscious dynamics the attention falls on a containing environment that can facilitate reflexivity (Hollway, 2008). Psychoanalytic reflexivity, through its attention to the self as implicated in processes of transference and countertransference, allows for interpretation with transparency and gives the self its context;

Identification also provides a useful starting point for conceptualising ethical relating, which should involve recognising others for what they are (not for what you want or need them to be nor for how they might want to be recognised) ...psychoanalytic theorising of identification problematizes how we can differentiate between ourselves and others in ways that enable us to identify with their experiences without confusing their situation with our own. In research ethics, this applies to how the researcher construes what she experiences and whether it is a fair and respectful way of knowing participants (Hollway, 2008:14)

Group supervision, by means of group seminars, is thought to provide a significant ethical safeguard for psychoanalytic observation. Given that the present research was not conducted in the context of psychoanalytic training I have drawn on my monthly academic supervision, my clinical supervision (which I discuss further below), my personal therapy as well as my writing *per se* to ensure a reflexive space that permits me to address the relational space between the child and myself in a manner that is as respectful, creative and committed to exploration as possible, that is, in a manner that opens up and generates meaning rather than closes it down.

Ethical questions emerged throughout my observations as well as later on in the course of my analytic writing about the children. Apart from the consent process where ethics are presented in a more explicit and coherent manner, I discuss my ethical concerns and my positioning alongside my decisions about my research design, that is, as they actually emerged, and some insisted, in the course of my observations.

It might be useful to note that an overarching ethical concern that informs my decision-making is that many of my decisions have been reached against the background of my previous psychoanalytic observations. Given that my research idea is situated in relation to my previous experience with observations, I think that one good safeguard for allowing fresh space in my new research has been to stay with the acknowledgment of such situatedness. In this case that

is not only inescapable as something that I carry with me in the form of my experience, but part of something more conscious upon which I decided to act.

### 3.5.3 Children

My decision to do my research with preschool children follows in part from my young child observations during my training in psychoanalytic observation. By looking to stay with children aged between three and five years old, I look to develop what had emerged at the end of my young (three to five years old) child observations and remained pending. As I have discussed earlier, both the topic of children's existential questions as well as the question of the boundary between the self and the other in research emerged most forcefully in the course of my observation of a young girl at her nursery, during what I mistook to be her last year there. In setting up my current observations, I looked to make the space and the time to explore these questions further in the context in which they initially emerged. I therefore chose to begin by considering preschool children in their nursery for my observations.

A second reason is that this is an age when children begin to interact verbally while also remaining strongly immersed in symbolic play in their negotiations of their inner and outer worlds. This allows me to move between different qualities and textures of meaning, between meanings that are named and, thus, more socially implicated and other pre-verbal or more embodied that acquire a more inner, self-enclosing quality.

Unlike with age, I decided to consider a change in the number of children and to open up to a larger number of children for my observations – more than one as was the case of my young child observation and no more than four or five. As part of a training, psychoanalytic observation focuses on a single child because it looks to delve deep into the emotional and mental development of the child as it is shaped in dialogue with her everyday relationships with significant others over the course of a year. Indeed, in my current topic, I wanted to maintain the psychoanalytic focus on the emotional and relational aspects of children's everyday encounters but I wanted to use it to think of the existential in the lives of preschool children rather than their development *per se*. Furthermore, the nature of the existential felt to be more inclusive and more open to the interactive and to the diverse. I therefore decided to do my research with more than one child so as to allow some space for individuality to emerge in its diversity in the context of something wider and commonly shared, as common and as given as existence, and to encompass the existential in children's lives in its many manifestations; as many as the children. At the same time, I was concerned with allowing

enough space for me, both inner and outer, in order to engage emotionally and relationally with each child, and to begin to imagine their worlds through my countertransference and my reveries. I therefore looked to do my observations with no more than four or five children, which would allow for some consistency in my time with them as well as in my return to them each week in the course of our time together. Lastly, I felt cautious about doing my research with two children because I was concerned about the potential dynamics in the context of a triangular relationship especially in the light of object relations and the processes of splitting. I, therefore, decided to focus my observations on three to five children.

### **3.5.4 The nursery**

My decision to do my research at a nursery is closely connected to my decision to do my research with preschool children. Being with the children at their nursery allowed me to be present in their ordinary play and their everyday encounters allowing also a degree of proximity to their emotional and relational negotiations. A nursery is also a space where the child of that age becomes for the first time part of a group outside her family, thus forming new attachments and challenging existing ones. Furthermore, becoming part of a wider space is existentially challenging as it reveals to the child a world larger than that of her immediate family, that is, her first world. Alongside a potential sense of connection or belonging, such a revelatory experience involves alienation and loss which is worked and reworked at the nursery. Being at the nursery poses an overarching existential challenge to the child, one that involves both opening up to something bigger as well as accepting some limitations. My decision to do my observations there was influenced by the thought that it would allow me to stay with the dialogue between loss and openness, alienation and belonging.

The nursery in which I chose to do my observations was suggested to me by a fellow PhD student who was also involved in research with children in an educational setting. I remember her talking warmly about the nursery and about its distinctive pedagogical approach that places curiosity, the sensory experience of the world and the contact with nature at its centre. I contacted them and I got an initial positive response. At the time, I had also contacted two other potential nurseries. I received a negative response from the first and a very positive response from the other, which was partly attached to an academic institution. I visited the two nurseries from which I had received positive responses, met with the head of the nurseries and was introduced to some of the staff team. My choice of nursery was influenced by its creative approach and openness to exploration by means of the everyday experience that spoke to a



phenomenological presence in the world. Such match with my inquiry felt also concerning in the beginning as maybe flattening or resisting of adversity or limitation. Furthermore, I felt alerted by my feelings of relief when meeting the head of the nursery and by how much I enjoyed our discussion. She warmly welcomed my interest in doing my observations with the children and talked to me about her being in the final stages of her own PhD on the experience of transition from nursery to primary school. I thought about the dynamics of being granted access by her; about how I was being allowed into the lives of the children by a woman-mother with whom I could identify: she was doing a PhD research and she was interested to understand something that I had agonised over in my previous observations and had stayed with me, inspiring this research. Reflecting on my decision, it was perhaps the relational dynamics with the head of the nursery together with the dynamics with my colleague who had suggested the nursery to me that were making this an inviting choice. In my eyes, and in a time of underlying anxiety, both of them were promising of an access because both had been granted access themselves and were, thus, embodying it. I was somehow already implicated in this nursery and this felt both alarming as well as stimulating. Coffey (1999:47) discusses relationships that emerge in the field in a reflexive light:

Relationships we create in the field raise our awareness of the ethnographic dichotomies of, for example, involvement versus detachment, stranger versus friend, distance versus intimacy ... Friendships can help to clarify the inherent tensions of the fieldwork experience and sharpen our abilities for critical reflection ... They do affect the ethnographer's gaze and it is important that that should be so

My concerns that the nursery felt ideologically and personally familiar were counterbalanced by the actual physical location of the nursery, that is, a more pragmatic aspect that felt real and grounding enough to base my decision on. My nursery was located in the centre of the city amidst the life of the busy streets, noise and scaffoldings. This moved me: I thought of it as a child alone and brave, daring to stand amidst the passing of life that surrounds it. On the contrary, although the other nursery was more neutral to me, the fact that it was academically affiliated, both spatially and institutionally, made me feel almost self-enclosed and prescribed in it.

The nursery<sup>5</sup> in which I did my observations is an Edinburgh council nursery in the city centre and in a walking distance of the university. It is situated on a small lane off a crowded street. From the garden of the nursery, I could sometimes hear noises and sounds from the street as

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<sup>5</sup> Please find a sketch of the nursery in the Appendix

well as the bell of the big clock signifying the passing of an hour. Aside from the garden, the nursery comprised two babies' room for the infants of the nursery, an art room and a main room in which there was a wooden house construction, a big couch surrounded by books, art and play tables, a square closed playspace, a boxroom and a kitchen. I spent most of my observations in the main room and some in the garden or in the art room. The main room looked out at the garden; the door to the garden was almost always open. Children could move freely from one room to another, including the babies' rooms as well as the reception and the offices of the staff team. Apart from the main room that connected to the garden with a glass wall, all the other rooms of the nursery were separated from the garden by a narrow long corridor; the corridor itself was separated from the garden by the glass wall. The life of the garden found its way into the main room but did not make it into the other rooms which felt more autonomous, sometimes enclosed and others protected.

The long corridor that separated the interior from the exterior space of the nursery marked my time in the nursery and has stayed in my mind, reminiscent, perhaps, of an inner and outer space. I recall how, each time on my way in, I walked down the long corridor between the rooms and the garden; on sunny days the corridor was filled with light coming from the garden; on darker days a feeling of crisp clarity remained, a kind of transparency that helped me to arrive. I remember seeing children as I walked down, some playing in the garden on my right, others through the window in the art room on my left and, then, at the end of the corridor behind the glass wall of the main room, familiar faces sitting at the art table letting me imagine that they were waiting for me.

### **3.5.5 Times of observations**

With regards to the time and the length of my observations, I amended the traditional structure of psychoanalytic observations to fit the objectives of my research. Instead of once a week for the duration of an academic year as is commonly the case in psychoanalytic observation, I decided to do my observations twice a week for the duration of six months. I did a total of thirty-two observations which were conducted twice a week from March to August on the same days and at the same time each week. In addition to consistency in the days and times, I maintained another basic characteristic of the method that is defining of its approach: I limited each observation to one hour. The reasons for these were both practical as well as theoretical.

On the practical side I was ready to start my observations in March, that is, already six months into the school year. I decided to end my observations in August and no earlier than that so as

to maintain some consistency with the children's and the nursery's schedules by attending the 'natural' end to the school year. This decision was reinforced by the fact that the children I came to focus on in my observations were all in their last year at the nursery, albeit this was not planned, at least not consciously. I found, however, that these practical limitations did not go against my thinking about my observations.

The objective of thinking about the child's development over time in psychoanalytic observation asks for a structure of observation that extends over long yet bounded period of time, such as an academic year, as well as over the course of a single week in order to allow room for the nuanced and the dynamic nature of early development to breathe (Rustin, 2012). My research question - how the existential plays out in children's emotional and relational worlds in the course of their everyday encounters - allowed for some more flexibility in the length of my observations and increased closeness in my meetings with the children. Meeting the children twice a week for six months allowed for greater intimacy in my observations; a slightly tighter and closer presence in their everydayness, which I think facilitated my exploration of the existential because it is diversely manifested in the day-to-day experience of the child. In addition, the consistency in my going, leaving and returning, together with the boundary of the one hour duration of each observation, allowed me to regard each observation as a snapshot in the course of the child's day at the nursery, a moment in the course of a life, and to open (it) up to its details, nuances and textures, as well as its emotional colourings. Drawing on therapeutic ideas with regards to containment allowed me to stay with the child in her experience as it wrote in me by means of my countertransference and my reveries in the course of this hour (Rustin, 2006). This process was assisted by the consistency in my coming and going which allowed both the child and me a space that was containing in its predictability but also bounded enough to test its capacity: its limits and its boundaries. Both the children and I grew accustomed to the structure of the one hour observations, each of which had a beginning, a middle and an end. This allowed both of us to play with each of these and allowed me to think of children's play in this context, that is, how I felt nearer the end of an observation, what had happened when I arrived and whether it had followed through.

### **3.5.6 Consent Process**

Having received approval from the University of Edinburgh Ethics Review Board and the Children and Families Department of Edinburgh City Council, I contacted the head of the

nursery and sent to her my information leaflet together with the consent letters<sup>6</sup> for the parents of preschool children and the staff of the nursery, including herself, which she distributed accordingly. In my information leaflet, I provided information about my research and myself and asked parents and staff to return the letter signed if they did not consent to their children participating. None of them returned their forms. Rather than inviting them to speak for their children, I thought of contacting parents before children in order to let them know what I was keen to do with their children: to reach out to them and ask them if it is okay to stay with them in their play and then to write about it. I think of children as active participants in their lives and I wanted to facilitate their participation and the responsibility of making a choice, including that of not making a choice or of changing it. I tried to make it as clear as possible that children could consent or not and withdraw their consent at any time.

During my first two days at the nursery, I facilitated an art activity as my consent process with the children. I brought paper cards and markers with me and sat in the room with them. I tried to contain my anxiety and I followed the suggestion of the head of the nursery to allow them entirely to come to me instead of me going to them. My anxiety derived also from the fact that, unlike what I expected, the children were not in separate rooms according to their age and so there were children of all ages in the room I was in, posing a first existential challenge to me masked in an 'ethical' concern about being neat in my process of consent. Some of the children came over and asked me what I was doing and who I was. Given that I myself was not clear about what the existential was, I decided to speak to children clearly and simply about what I was there to do (Einarsdottir, 2007), leaving it open enough for what might emerge. I told them that I was there because I was interested in children and their play and I wanted to know more about it. I asked them if they were okay with me being with them in their play and writing about it. If they were okay, they could let me know by drawing a picture of themselves and sticking it on a big piece of card next to their name<sup>7</sup>. I also told them that they could take their picture off the collage if they wished to.

I asked them to respond by means of a drawing so that I engage with them a little longer and give them the time to stay with my asking and myself a little longer. I also wanted to invite them to negotiate their response by means of a medium that relies less on words and more on symbols (Davis, 1998, Einarsdottir, 2007). Asking them to draw a picture of themselves, cut it out and stick it on a piece of card alongside other children's pictures was a way to ask them to choose if they wanted to make themselves present in a context that I introduced by my very coming into their space. The drawing of their portraits is less immediate than the writing of

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<sup>6</sup> Please find copies of the Information leaflets and Consent letters in the Appendix

<sup>7</sup> Please find photos of children's consent drawings in the Appendix

their name and involves a process of making, a gradual becoming that potentially allows the child a more embodied understanding of choosing to be seen by another, to emerge in another's eyes or not. The cutting out and sticking in is a way of marking their individuality; the process of cutting oneself out of a context and positioning oneself into a new context symbolises some kind of movement that my question of consent and my being there asks for. It could potentially facilitate a more concrete making of a choice; a kind of tactile yes or no. In addition to the groundedness that art allows for in the process of consent through its symbolic and embodied nature, it also permits a different kind of thinking of the question of consent; a kind of sensory processing by making the art. It also asks of the child some personal commitment because it asks her to choose to give or not some more of her time in the making of the portrait and in placing it on the collage.

I thought of the very making of a collage as facilitating choice and allowing fragmentary, more permanent, positioned or more random representations of oneself in a wider context. Practically, this translates into allowing children to position themselves where they want in the collage, that is, in the space I introduce each time I am present, to change their position or to take their self out of the picture, that is, to choose not to be seen and withdraw their participation at any stage (Davis, 1998, Balen et al, 2000). On the other side of this is the question of children who did not consent yet interacted with people who have consented - other children, staff or myself - and about whom I wrote. I have chosen to write about those children as part of the encounters and the inescapable surrounding world of *my* children. I think of them as passers-by in the making of a scene and, rather than directly, I write about them in the context of *my* child's play and our relationship together. What role does the child play in it? How does she affect the unfolding of my snapshot?

### **3.5.7 Criteria for participation and choice of children**

My only criterion with regards to children's participation was their age. Other than that, it depended entirely upon whether they would like to be part of my observations or not. Of the preschool children who approached me and to whom I explained what I was there to do, ten drew their picture and wrote their name. Some of the children were below three years old and I explained to them that I was interested in doing this activity with older children; still, some of them drew their picture and gave it to me. One of the children was five and a half; she returned to the nursery after going to primary school to do one more year before leaving for good.

Of the ten children who consented I focused my observations on five. This was not a conscious pre-selection but something that happened gradually over the course of both my observations and my analysis. Even though my observations grew to focus largely on these five children, I did not know that I would come to write solely about them in my thesis until the days of my analysis.

The question of how, among all the children who gave their consent to my research, I chose to stay with those five children draws on questions of personal ethics and as such I think that I can approach it by observing myself and my relationship to the children (Flyvbjerg, 2001, Foucault 2005). Rather than being acted upon, the choice feels like it happened. The difference lies less in an active or passive quality and more in the inescapable relatedness as opposed to an assumed separateness. The choice of the children happened with return: it became a matter of return as I found myself, in the passing of the weeks and following their consent, returning to be surprised by Eilidh, longing to find May, missing Eilidh, following Edward's steps to the drawing table with his eyes to my eyes. Longing or missing or being seduced are by no means clear of want; in fact, they are about pleasure and the absence of it. Being surprised is not without expectation: what surprised me, surprised me at the expense of something I have known or experienced. The return to, or else the choosing of, the children has been subjective, affective and purposeful. How can it not be when I arrive at them with my questions, my answers to my questions, my theories and with the whole of my self, as an adult, as a woman, as a childless woman, as a foreign, as a child? (Cixous, 1991). The selves that I bring to my research, to my seeing, my being with and my writing about children are many, many of which remain unknown:

In speaking the 'I', I undergo something of what cannot be captured or assimilated by the 'I', since I always arrive too late to myself (Butler, 2005)

Amongst gender, time and space, there is the self that wants to mother, the self that seeks to be mothered, the self that wants to disrupt, the self that wants to be seen, the self that wants to know, the self that wants to fail, to change, to be changed and so on. This web of selves tightly and dynamically interwoven with more fixed givens such as gender, time and space cannot be fully known, let alone controlled and separated from my encounters with the other. Moreover, they affect and define my relationship with the children as well as the decisions that I make in the course of this relationship. They are, thus, not to be escaped but stayed with, returned to and reflected upon time and time again. Instead of biases, I treat them as tools and guides that

allow some transparency in my decision-making and in the fact that this is not a neat exhaustive process but something more fused than that.

### **3.5.8 The role of adults**

As discussed earlier in the Consent Process section, I asked the staff of the nursery for their consent to my observations given that they are a consistent and ongoing part of children's everyday encounters. My thinking of the nursery staff and of their roles in the everyday lives of the children is informed by the theoretical approach of my method that views the surrounding world of the child also as a representation of internal unconscious objects. In my thinking and my writing about them, they are nurturing figures that embody and awake maternal phantasies and needs both for the children and me, in getting in touch with my own preschool years in the course of my observations. Assuming a more adult role, I abided by the staff and supported a collaborative approach towards children in the everyday running of my observations. In doing so, I tried to ensure that my presence in the nursery would not disrupt the work of both the children and the adults in there, while acknowledging that the presence of an observer in itself can evoke strong persecutory phantasies. This is even more prominent in the context of a childcare setting and the potential associations that surround an observer who is represented by the authority of an academic institution. I therefore tried to be sensitive and reflexive to those dynamics while remaining present and consistent in my observations and clear about my role as an observer.

My approach towards the children's parents was guided by the same thinking however, in the course of my observations, I rarely met the children's parents apart from very briefly towards the end of my observations while collecting their children or following the end of my observations while walking in the street.

### **3.5.9 The process of psychoanalytic observation vs ethnographic/participant observation**

I began my observations considering them as basically informed by psychoanalytic infant observation in their basic structure. Given my interest in the existential and my difficulty with the subject-object boundary in my prior experience of infant observation, I allowed myself to remain open to consider some methodological amendments that would help me address my

inquiry. Still, I consider my observations to be psychoanalytic and not another form of ethnographic or participant observation because they build on some characteristic traits of psychoanalytic observation whereas the relational turn that I took is informed by the theory of relational psychoanalysis rather than the onto-epistemology of other participant forms of ethnographic observation.

As for my participation, on arriving at the nursery I joined the children where they were and in what they were doing and did not actively engage or initiate play or a verbal encounter with them, although I did respond to them when they did. In doing so, I looked to become that other in the presence of whom they played or else in Winnicott's (2005) words an other in the presence of whom they could be alone. This did not prove to be challenging for the children or myself. On the contrary, it felt like children can readily enter into that state in their play and make use of it in very creative ways. Rather than a physical aloneness, Winnicott speaks of the capacity to enter into that state of immersion in the holding attention of another. In this context, the other can be taken in by the child and participate in their object world while standing at the receiving end of her projections in the course of her play. This kind of presence, alongside the short length of the observation and the consistency in the time and day, is what distinguishes my observations from other forms of observation. Moreover, it was these specific boundaries - or simply traits - that allowed me the space to tune in to the child's emotional worlds by tuning in to the space in between us.

Shuttleworth (2010:9) writes:

I can observe but not participate: this is what paves the way for intersubjectivity  
and an interpersonal unconscious to begin a dialogue

Like in the psychoanalytic consulting room, the observer enters the observation without memory or desire; theory is also set aside, making space for experience: that is, the emotional experience of the observation; what it stirs in the observer and how this might be used as a tool towards understanding (Hollway, 2011).

Although I was open to explore my lived experience of the observations in the above-described phenomenological manner, I think that my experience has not been in itself clear of memory, desire or theory. I did not explicitly comment theoretically on my observations but my writing, just like my attention, my dismissing, my forgetting or my surprise, cannot but be theoretically and personally informed. I do not think of this taking me farther from psychoanalytic observation and closer to other forms of observation. Instead, I view it as aligned with infant



observation as informed by relational psychoanalysis or some of the post-structural thinking on subjectivity and data. In a phenomenological sense, perhaps it is a way to stay open and observe how my lived experience cannot be anything but influenced by my subjectivity.

Another defining aspect of psychoanalytic observation is the writing of the observations. In my writing I did not distinguish reflexive from process notes but focused on the emotional experience of being the observer over the course of an hour in our encounter with the child. In the acknowledgment that each writing of the observation is a re-making of the observation on the whole, rather than a record of it, I wrote my notes soon after finishing each observation so as to stay as close as possible to my experience of it. Furthermore, for the duration of my observations, I met with the supervisor of my past infant observations in my psychoanalytic observation course bringing into my current research her experience with the method as well as with child psychotherapy. I considered the latter significant in ensuring that I write staying as close as possible to the ground of child psychotherapy as it is currently practiced given that I am not a child psychotherapist working with children. We had supervision approximately once a month for the duration of the six-month period of observations, focusing on the processing of a single observation at each meeting.

I will discuss writing further in the section of my analysis as, given the theoretical informing of my method, I consider it to be an analysis *per se*.

### **3.5.10 Use of self**

In my observations, I maintained a flexible and discrete presence joining with children in their play rather than introducing something new. Presence is a direction in itself and I drew on myself more actively in the writing of my observations and later on in my analysis rather than at the time of the observations (Rustin, 2006). I have discussed in the section on participation how I used myself in my observations as influenced by the theory of my method. There are, however, more than one selves that I arrived with pertaining to my identity. I considered the selves I brought with me less as biases and more as tools: by attending to them I could also attend to their dialogue with the children's selves, the in-between space where we met relationally. One of the selves I brought was that of being a non-native speaker of English, which signified a kind of difference that was readily picked up on by the children. I have tried to use my difference in a way that would allow me access to more internal states or qualities of difference or alienation that are present at a very early stage, as early as infancy, which played out in our encounters.

I also tried to maintain some transparency with regards to my own emerging wishes in the course of my observations with children at a nursery. In doing so, I looked to return to my role as an observer and not to fall solely into that of a mother, a therapist or a nursery teacher, even though these roles or wishes could not but exist in a dialogue with my observer role.

I have discussed my observations in the light of my research design focusing on the processes involved in making choices and the ethical concerns that accompanied them. I will now discuss my analytic approach, the place of writing in it and the ethical challenges I was confronted with in thinking with theory.

## **3.6 Analytic approach**

### **3.6.1 Introduction**

It was not until I finished my observations that I began to think about what I could make of them. What emerges? What happened there? What story calls me? My time with the children was not free from my expectations, my purpose or my theories, my history and my childhood. That is, it was not deprived of the stories that I carry with me, that I live by and think with; rather it was realized by them. Meaning therefore happened all the time: in the very choice of the nursery; the children I was drawn to and the children that were drawn to me; the art table in the nursery that I retreated to readily when the children were away; the children that joined me there and then became my children; in my words, my silences and my seeing; in the time(s) that I stayed there and the time that I left. And then, in my memory of the observations. In my writing of them. And in reading them.

Hunt (1989:81) speaks of how the inner worlds of the researchers affect:

their choice of setting, experience in the initial stages of fieldwork, and the research roles they assume. The transferences that are situationally mobilized in the fieldwork encounter have implications for the questions researchers ask, the answers they hear, and the materials they observe. Most important transferences structure the researcher's ability to develop empathic relations with those subjects who provide the essential source of sociological data

Those stories that are my observations are entangled with my presence at the nursery, which is permeated by my choices which are in turn permeated by my other stories, those selves and those narratives that I carry with me. Still, what happened there are not my stories or children's stories alone, rather it is their encounter with each other. When my observations finish and I look back at them, I occupy a space from where I add another layer of meaning to what is already multiply layered. Meaning making from that place or else analysis are the stories that I make out of this encounter at that given time.

In this section, I discuss my analysis or my meaning making as something that, in accordance with post-structural feminist thinking (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012), is not fixed or linear but temporary and always becoming, encompassing a lot of layers and happening in in-between spaces. Given that the method of psychoanalytic observation is traditionally informed by a subject-object epistemology, I turn to the post-structural feminist thinking of data, of writing and of theory, to help me think of my analysis in more relational, reciprocal ways consistent with my ontological take in this research;

many postmodernists are deeply suspicious of either the emancipatory or the conversational framing of the interpretive project. They opt instead for interpretation as a kind of spontaneous play or an incessant deciphering that unravels the multiple meanings of such notions as self, identity, objectivity, subjectivity, presence, truth, and being (Schwandt, 2000:203)

Following on from my discussion of the observational process in the previous section, I now turn to the process of my analysis. I discuss writing, reading and thinking with theory as different spaces; spaces of meaning making with which I engaged so as to generate meaning (rather than to unearth meaning as if it were something outside of me awaiting to be found), to make and remake it each time I returned to the material (St. Pierre and Jackson, 2018). To illustrate this process below, I bring in fragments of some writing that followed the end of my observations when I was trying to make sense of both the loss of the children as well as of what I do with what I am left with. In these writings, I use the metaphor of space and place as a way of bringing in some concreteness, that is, to symbolise, name, contain, observe and speak about the emerging spaces and allow them their inter-fluidity. In what follows I imagine writing, reading and theory as analytic spaces in which I enter and think of the children and make them all over again. I think of how the self is implicated in each in search of meaning. I will end with giving a more descriptive account of the process of my analysis as it evolved from the moment that my observations finished.

### 3.6.2 Writing

Writing is central to my research. I consider my analysis to be grounded in writing as a way of knowing and of playing with different meanings. My analytic approach encompasses different writings that took place in the course of my research. Central is my writing about each child which grew to become my explicit analytic method, namely writing as an inquiry into children's existential encounters in the light of our time together. This writing however, is in dialogue with (informed by and informing of) other writing in the course of my research: the writing during my fieldwork (as inextricably tied to observations forming the body of my data); and the writing in the space between the end of my fieldwork and my writing about each child. Although not realised until later stages, I think of both those writings as data that carry some meaning and help me make sense of my time with the children in the light of my question. I thus consider all my writing to be analytic work, data and analysis at once. In this section, I discuss writing, thinking of it as a process and as an act that carries embodied meanings about my research.

#### 3.6.2.1 *Writing (in) the space between the end of my observations and the beginning of my analysis*

September 2014:

I need to know whether I do this because I need to do something with my fear of death, with death, perhaps to death. I need to do something to death. It is now, on completion of my fieldwork, that my fear awoke again. I completed my fieldwork, I lost my children. I am now elsewhere. In losing, I am afforded a space.<sup>8</sup>

For Cixous (1993:7) writing is grounded in loss:

To begin (writing, living) we must have death. I like the dead, they are the doorkeepers who while closing one side 'give' way to the other. We must have death, but young, present, ferocious, fresh death, the death of the day, today's death. The one that comes right up to us so suddenly we don't have time to avoid it, I mean to avoid feeling its breath touching us

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<sup>8</sup> Extract from a writing for supervision thinking about analysis - one month after the end of my observations

Or in resisting it:

Writing is this effort not to obliterate the picture, not to forget (ibid)

Following my observations and after reading over them, I found myself in this space between being with the children and being without them; between my fieldwork and my analysis, between one kind of writing (my observations) and another (my analysis). This in-between space was filled with another kind of writing; a writing as a container of my agony of my loss as well as of the uncertainty about what was to follow. Apart from being a container (or perhaps because of it), this writing is also a kind of inquiry into analysis and into data. Feminist and post-structural thinking share a common ground when it comes to writing: Richardson and St. Pierre (2005:962) write so as to know; Cixous (1991:35) has nothing to write except what she does not know. There is, another kind of absence. For both, loss opens up space to know partial, unstable, non-omnipotent, non-exhaustive, in-between knowledges (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005):

Writing is good: it's what never ends (Cixous, 1991:4)

And to have:

The other is safe if I write (ibid:4) ...And with it-her-self-me-her-hand-, I begin to trace on the paper (ibid:

7)

Writing allows thus some continuity in the form of an ongoing inquiry that also ensures that the other is never really lost; a constant becoming that repels death.

For Cixous (1993:11), loss is inextricably tied with gain, and both are tied with guilt:

The misfortune of fortune - which will make our lives an unending struggle to be fair - is that in losing we have something to gain. Mixed loss and gain: that's our crime. This is what we are always guilty of, guilt we can't do anything about with these unexpected and terrible gains

I think that my writing moves between these two streams: from having and losing and dealing with this loss, to losing and finding and dealing with this guilt. Alongside the loss of a prior oneness, the possibility of making a meaning (even if a temporary one) comes with the loss of the possibility of a never-ending generativity.

### **3.6.2.2 Writing observations**

September 2014:

I have been at the sea. Inside the sea. I entered the sea and the sea enveloped me. The sea happened to me as much as I happened to the sea. My fieldwork happened to me. In search of this encounter, I find it embodied and lived through in my writing. What happened, happened to my writing. My writing carries a truth about my fieldwork, a kind of truth that feels less descriptive and more empirical. It became the object that carried through this truth. In search of data, I turn to my writing and, for a moment, I look at it empty of words; as a container, a channel, an act, a space. What happened and who was there?

Writing my observations was a return to familiar grounds. This, until something came and unsettled my writing. It, did not come from outside but from within, like an urge. My writing was gradually freed up from structures, both external and internal. It attained a flow deprived of full stops, yet abundant with commas that connected long streams of happenings, insisting on moments and on breaking them open to engage with their skins. With time, these were visited by images and phantasies and some memories, visits that disrupted the truth of one voice or one time or one space. When did this happen? Who imagined this imagining? Jackson and Mazzei (2012) introduce a mutually constitutive stance towards analysis and break the subject/object binary: meaning happens in between the researcher and the researched, in between inside and outside. My stories carried a transient quality which deepened the more I let go of my search for existential concerns and moments. In his discussion of projective identification, Ogden (2004:172) speaks of reverie as 'a manifestation of the unconscious interplay of the analytic subjects'. Projective identification is seen as generating a form of intersubjective thirdness, an entity that is separate from and in relation with both the analyst and the analysand; in introducing an interpersonal understanding of projective identification, Ogden (2004) speaks of subjectivities as surrendered and negated by each other, in a process of mutual transformation and creation of a new third subject; in doing so, he reworks the subject-object binary which gives rise to a form of analytic relatedness. Bringing Ogden's workings into my writing, I can think of it as this new third subject, the subject of the projective identification that, in its flow, embodied something of the lived experience of the children, at this specific age and in this specific space, which I looked to find out there, outside of me.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Extract from a writing for supervision one month after the end of my observations

Looking back at my observations, I became aware of a shift in the writing of them when compared to my writing in my past psychoanalytic observations. In the present research, I followed the traditional writing practices of my method, which are similar to the *post facto* write up of a clinical session (Rustin, 2012). I wrote down my present observations as soon as possible after they happened, capturing the hour as it unfolded naturally and the events as they occurred sequentially, and registering my emotional responses to these. Still, the writing of the present observations was different in that it was less fixed or bounded in its form. In addition, the boundary between my self and the children was more blurred. What did the observations do to my writing? Could it be that it carried something of the existential in children? Of my relationship with them? Did it embody some part of my relational turn in my method? Do I think of this as data? What happened to the writing of my observation can be viewed of as another layer of meaning that tells me something about what I went there to find out. It is a kind of data that resides neither solely in the children nor in myself but is found embodied in an in-between third place: writing. Still, it was not until reading over my observations that I came to acknowledge it.

### 3.6.3 Reading

October 2014:

Data are words (St. Pierre and Jackson, 2014). There is, a sea of words. I have been at the sea. Inside the sea. The sea is in ceaseless movement. Data are too. I never find them as I leave them. Each time I meet them I make them all over again. St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) say that meanings are not understood - they are made. That is, I will not understand my children - I will make them. Analysis

happens “in the middle of things”, without a beginning or end, without origin or destination (...) everywhere and all the time (St. Pierre and Jackson, 2014:717)

I am here and I am grappling with what, in the language of research, is called analysis. What I think I grapple with is meaning. I don't know if I am fighting for or against meaning. Munro (2012) writes of

An intense process, one in which we travelled together between extremes of wanting to grab life as hard as possible and a determination to let life go.

I just finished reading over my observations. I don't know if I am fighting for or against making meaning (out) of them. I can see them both. Meaning slipping through my fingers just when I thought I grasped it. Meaning popping up, like a clown out of its box, while I look elsewhere. I think that where I stand is this space, in between for and against, where I resist making meaning and I accept that I cannot but make meaning even in resisting it. Apart from inescapable,

making meaning is also a desire. I have always an underlying desire to understand the child, even if the purpose of my understanding is to open up to encompass more than one understanding. It is within this drive to make meaning that resisting meaning can occur. It is in the already process of meaning making that I can resist meaning making, resist coding, resist patterns, resist sameness, return to surprises, errors, nuances and remain decentred, that is attuned to the world as unstable and always becoming<sup>10</sup>. In search of a conceptual centre that allows me to remain decentred I meet Jackson and Mazzei (2013:267) who meet Derrida:

To talk about deconstruction as destabilizing is to approach the data in ways that prevent a closure of meaning

There I am, in this space, place. What story will I make? What is my question? What is my intention? I think that these can only be revealed, or perhaps made with, in the very process of meaning making, that is, of grappling with meaning or meanings. There I am, in this space, place, where I meet my children for a third time, from a third space, a third way of being with them: observing them, writing them, now, reading them. From this space I can ask: what was my question? What was my intention? What did the children do with my questions? What did the observing itself do to my intentions?

There I am in this space, place. I have read my observations and in reading them I was surprised, ashamed, confused and, I was seduced to highlight everything that carried a possibility. In red, what surprised me - in blue, the errors. Drawn to surprises, errors and shady spaces, I observed this urge of mine not only to identify a series of them but also to name them and to categorize them. That is to identify patterns, even if these are patterns of inconsistencies. As if the mind is trained to look for order, safety, certainty, as if it desires meaning. The texts began to sink in red: almost everything surprises me. The more I read the more I highlight; as the observations grow connections grow, along with the suspicion of a meaning, of a pregnant story. It is in this highlighted possibility and in this suspicion that my question, my intention, my theory, my conceptual centre, my idea could be met. I don't know their name, but I will attempt to trace their qualities, their colours and their textures in my children's descriptions.<sup>11</sup>

The reading of the observations is another analytic space. In this third means of staying with the children, I take notes of what comes to mind. This is where connections begin to be made and associations surface from my time with the children which has now sat in me a little more. It is at this point that I note the Stranger next to Nadia's observation that will later become the character around which I discuss Nadia and our relationship.

Analysis happens anew here, as each staying with the children, each reading of my observations, generates different meanings. Where my attention falls is indicative of where I am. Are not history, theory and interpretation already implied in the finding, in the identifying of something among other things? My attention falls on different places because I am at

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<sup>10</sup> Jackson & Mazzei (2013), St. Pierre & Jackson (2014)

<sup>11</sup> Extract from a writing for supervision on (re)reading my observations



different places each time. Meaning thus does not remain fixed or stable but changes in each encounter because the moment, the writing too, changes in each encounter as it speaks to me differently. Still I cannot escape being implicated in the moment that I observe and the meaning I make.

October 2014:

Can I be surprised all over again? Can I be surprised twice, three times, over the same instance? Reading embodies a third space for my children and myself, that is a space where I meet my children for the third time. Now, in this third space of reading, new instances and encounters with my children surprise me. Yet, the quality of the surprising moment remains familiar: the moment is intense, frank, bold, it looks at me in the eyes, courageous, intelligent, raw, its language is raw, simple, wrong, it draws me straight in and captures me, like a snapshot, momentary, transient, it is small, very short, little and in this littleness lives a world.

The moment that happens to me is reciprocal. I happen to the moment as much as the moment happens to me and surprises me, not only as the reader and the writer of the moment, but also as the observer of the moment and ultimately as being there, in the moment. Yet, there is a distinctive quality in and of this moment which comes through strongly and feels more passive. I find the word thrownness, which Heidegger first used to describe the being in or else Dasein, helpful in my attempt to describe this quality. In reading this moment I feel that I am thrown into the moment as the moment begins to happen to me. Indeed,

There is a significant passive aspect to being-in. Dasein finds itself already situated in a particular world that is arranged in a definite, concrete fashion and where particular things have already shown up as mattering (Wrathall & Murphey, 2013:14)

In this world I am thrown into, I bring with me concrete characteristics of my being, that is my body and my history which affect my encounter with the world because they already carry a certain meaning (Wrathall & Murphey, 2013). Withy (2011:63) discusses situatedness as a specific aspect of thrownness:

As entities who make sense of things, we are delivered over to the things that we make sense of and to specific ways of making sense of them. We are thrown into particular situations, and this means that we are given over to particular things to make sense of (and not others), and particular ways of doing so (and not others)

There are givens that define our situatedness and constrain the making of meaning; these are, the 'here' and 'now' or else the particular space and time of the situation we find ourselves in and try to make sense of, the specific lives we are situated in and the particulars of our lives i.e. our context, body, history, personality as well as our specific culture or tradition (Withy, 2011). Such characteristics reveal the finitude and the changeability and the temporariness of our making meaning and their inescapability.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Extract from a writing for supervision

### **3.6.3.1 Data**

I have been interested in children's relationship with the existential and specifically the emotional and affective qualities of this relationship. The distinctive nature of emotion and affect has informed the places in which I looked for them.

By 'emotional' I mean those qualities of the existential that are expressive of inner states. The distinctive nature of emotion becomes clearer next to or against affect, which is more abstract and primitive, less formed and pre-conscious. Emotions are expressions of affects although, according to Shouse (2005), both precede language. I think of consciousness as the differentiating aspect between the two. I speak of affective responses to the existential that are different from emotional in that they are less conscious and can be communicated or known only by being projected, contained and thought by an other and through the other's inner experience, that is, relationally: by being carried by an other object or another person (Bollas, 2007) at times a manner or a whole state of being.

I am thus interested in how the existential is embodied in the child's play, in a word, an object, a picture, a movement, but also in her doing and her being at the nursery, in her relationships with others and with myself as someone who arrived interested in it.

For this, I did psychoanalytic observations in order to pay close attention to my countertransference as a way to imagine the experience of the child. My inner states have thus been my data. Informed by recent developments in relational psychoanalysis, I have thought about my observations relationally and in doing so I looked to make way for a view of the existential as it is relationally and reciprocally experienced in the context of the observational relationship and communicated through interpersonal unconscious dynamics. A dream, a mistake or a memory of mine are therefore also my data because they might be holding less conscious material. St. Pierre (1997) speaks about the irruption of transgressive data in qualitative research, that is, data that escape language and remain uncategorized and unnamed. She identifies, emotional data, sensual data, dream data and response data as those kinds of data that are often left out of our research as excessive or uncomfortable enough to stay with. According to St. Pierre those data are generative of meaning rather than exhaustive of it, resisting closure and insisting on keeping interpretation at play:

We must learn to live in the middle of things, in the tension of conflict and confusion and possibility; and we must become adept at making do with the messiness of that condition and at finding agency within (St.Pierre, 1997:176)

Paying attention to those less tangible, explicit data that often appear in the form of an inner state is a kind of reading the self in the research that is not bound to singularity but expands and trespasses the diverse spaces, times and people that are involved in the research process. It encompasses the spaces, times and people that both the participant and the researcher bring with them as well as their communication or else the dynamic relationship in which they exist.

I began to be aware of these data or to collect them during the reading of my observations and simultaneously with my analysis or during the very writing of my story. That so, just like my analysis had begun long before I sat to do it, my data collection was not exhausted by the end of my observations but continued afterwards.

Both countertransference and projective identification, on which I rely heavily in my interpretations, are relational ways of knowing that acknowledge that the self is connected to the other. The interpretation that relies on these seems to be reminiscent of a relationship, of an interpersonal unconscious encounter that lingers on. Writing then becomes a way of knowing, both in unearthing the interpretation by unpacking the transference or the projection which can be traced back in the time of the observation as well as to make it by attending to it and writing through it.

### **3.6.4 Writing again**

Richardson (2001) speaks of writing as a method of discovery. A way to 're-word' the world or the self through the encounter with the world or the other. She says that when we write, we always write about ourselves even if disguised in the form of an other that exists outside us. Writing is thus a continuous co-creation of the self (Richardson, 2001). Language is at its core. Cixous (1991:23) says:

If you do not possess a language, you can be possessed by it: let the tongue remain foreign for you

The foreignness of my writing tongue allowed me a space from where I could begin to know parts of my self. It was a third space, between myself and my mother tongue which had to be foreign enough to name the familiar and other enough so as to begin to get closer to the self:

This 'worded world' never accurately, precisely, completely captures the studied world, yet we persist in trying. Writing as a method of inquiry honours and encourages the trying, recognizing it as emblematic of the significance of language. I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it. I was taught, though, as perhaps you were, too, not to write until I knew what I wanted to say, until my points were organized and outlined (Richardson, 2001:35)

In my research, I used writing to think by turning my imaginings of children's worlds into words:

So perhaps dreaming and writing do have to do with traversing the forest, journeying through the world, using all the available means of transport, using your own body as a form of transport... This does not mean one will get there. Writing is not arriving; most of the time it's not arriving (Cixous, 1993:65)

Rather, it is opening up a space to play with meanings. I used writing in my analysis to explore my encounters with the children and to play with their play. I used it as a way to trace where we meet and where we depart from each other, our boundaries and our shared realities. It was also as a means of meditating on different meanings:

Postmodernism claims that writing is always partial, local and situational and that our selves are always present no matter how hard we try to suppress them – but only partially present because in our writing we repress parts of ourselves as well. Working from that premise frees us to write material in a variety of ways – to tell and retell. There is no such a thing as getting it right, only getting it differently contoured and nuanced (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005:962)

In place of triangulation that assumes an exhausted triangular fixed validation, Richardson puts crystallization:

Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of repose (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005:963)

Interpretation thus becomes an ongoing act which happens all the time; instead of making an interpretation we introduce interpretation by means of writing, mapping rather than signifying (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). I used writing in my research to think with theory. Thinking with theory happened in writing (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). I attempted to write the moment open and to introduce different lenses with which to look at it. In doing so, I attempted not to condemn it to relativism and isolation but to make some space for the moment to breathe in its various translations and retranslations.

### **3.6.5 Thinking with theory**

November 2014:

An existential moment and theory

Together.

Together?<sup>13</sup>

Arriving at children from a place of psychoanalysis already implicated in the ‘I’ of my method, I acknowledge theory as constitutive in the very registering of the existential in my observations. Drawing on relational psychoanalysis, I acknowledge my personal narratives, my history and my situatedness, my wishes and my phantasies as other theories; narratives through which I see the children and with which I think of them. As inevitably present, these need not be viewed as biases but as tools in the making of meaning:

Nor is this ethics about discovering a true essence – there is no self waiting to be discovered – but it is a process of creation and re-invention out of available resources (Byrne, 2003:31)

Jackson and Mazzei’s ‘thinking with theory’ as a method of analysis acknowledges the inescapability of theory in the very thinking of a text. Texts and narratives are then plugged into each other, energising each other, stimulating and lighting each other up, giving life to a meaning that is both encompassing of them and in-between. Although relieved that my

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<sup>13</sup> Extract from a writing for supervision

analytic method named the messy aliveness of the analytic process, I frequently returned to the futility of trying to grasp the existential and the guilt for trying to pin it down to words; for pinning children's play - life - down to theory. My guilt is attached to the assumption of both the existential and children as pure, independent from, and clean of theory.

What happens to the child or to the existential when I 'mentally pair up with my theory'? (Ferro, 2005)

Bollas (2007:14) speaks of the unconscious to unconscious pairing, the listening to one's unconscious with one's own unconscious, as a kind of object relations, a 'Freudian pair':

Psycho-historically, this builds on an object relation that has been repressed or lost due to infantile amnesia: the self's relation to an intelligent other, embodied in the mother. The self's relation to the mother is, amongst other things, a relation to one's own unconscious, as in the beginning the foetal and the maternal unconscious are barely distinguishable. Just as the maternal unconscious looked after us, so, too does our unconscious, and I think we know this. Our sense that we should trust our 'gut instincts' or 'sense' of things means that we give ourselves over to our unconscious sense of things rather than to some other order. This does not mean we are right. Indeed, our gut response may be quite wrong. But the object relation is important (Bollas, 2007:56)

When I mentally pair up with my theory, do I miss out on this object relation? Do I lose children in their being, in their truth, their experience as it is relationally conveyed? (Stern, 1985) Do I mis-attune or dis-attune altogether? Do I tune into an omnipotent state of oneness with theory that leaves the third other, the child, the existential outside of my pairing with theory fearing it might challenge it each with its life?

Using the metaphor of space and place helps me to make some sense of the different spaces (by symbolizing them and by drawing parallels) that I try to bring together or else to plug into each other. It helps me to demystify them, to test their distance and proximity and to contain my concern in bringing them together in different constellations: what does theory do to the existential moment? What does it do to the child? What does one theory do to another?

November 2014:

Geographers speak about this tension with regards to space and place: the interchangeable use, the binary thinking, the outdoing of each other (Agnew, 2005). Space, it is associated with the general, the abstract, the absolute. The observer; the control. It is the location, the address. Place, is the living in the address, the occupation of the location. It is the real, the embodied. The particular. The physical that is part of the phenomenal space. In line with the qualities

associated to them, space and place attach themselves to different theories. Space is objectivist, Newtonian, concrete, independent of the objects that it contains. Place is subjectivist, human, lived, phenomenological, postmodern (Agnew, 2005, Thrift, 2003).

What if we refuse this imagination? Massey asks.

The imagination of space as a surface on which we are placed, the turning of space into time, the sharp separation of local place from the space out there; these are all ways of taming the challenge that the inherent spatiality of the world presents (Massey, 2005:6)

What if we refuse this imagination? Thrift (2003:98) tells it differently: to unblock space. He starts immediately. He discusses one among four kinds of spaces under the title 'place space' (ibid:102). No comma, no dash, neither or nor and in between. Just an empty space, empty enough to differentiate them without, however, denoting the kind of the relationship they have. To me, this is a first representation of an open(ed) space which allows for a diversity of configurations of and between space and place in my writing.

Moment and theory as place-space:

My moment resists theory. It is stronger than theory, more real, alive, generative, it can break theory. Adolescent. It resists the authority of the theory, it resists being pinned down. If my moment is existential, plural, it feels empty of the personal, of its history. If it is psychoanalytic, it looks over to the other side where the transient is and the plural. My moment resists being tied down to one meaning. Moment resists being subsumed to theory or else, place resists being consumed by space. In this configuration, space is the container. Place is nostalgic, regressive (Agnew, 2005). I arrive at the place, at theory, defensively, with the assumption that theory is wider than moment. That theory contains the moment or else that space contains the place and that place will defend itself by breaking space. As a place, moment is closed down. But if moment is closed down, then theory is too.

Moment and theory as space-space:

Changing moment from place to space, changes the relationship between moment and theory and my relationship with moment. Space here resembles Massey's space.

Imagined as space, the moment lands to its momentariness; it is found in its everydayness, grounded in the ordinary, the immediate, the small, the transient.

As a space, moment becomes more plural, more relational and I become more generous and less possessive, protective of it. Imagining moment as a space opens it up to a wealth of other spaces of mutual dependency and interaction, such as the reader and the theory. Moment can thus be thought of as both contained by theory as well as illuminated by it and realized through it. Thinking of the moment as space, opens up moment, but it opens up theory too. It introduces theory to its embodiments and moment to its possibilities. It introduces both to some kind of life. I think that meeting each other as space to space, moment and theory make each other.

Thinking of moment, psychoanalysis and existentialism as three spaces in relation to each other softens both the moments' edginess and the theory's heaviness. Perhaps, in this space psychoanalysis and existentialism come together not as either/or, or as or/and alone, but as continuities.

I have turned to space in search of a place wherefrom I can begin to engage with my material. Moving in between space and place, changing space to place and turning it back to place again, allows me to play with theory, to articulate some qualities of the moment and to imagine different configurations between them. By freeing up space and place to engage with each other, contradicting each other, meeting each other and making each other, I imagine theory and moment engaging with each other. And myself engaging with them. Thrift (2003:96) says:

However different the writing about these different kinds of spaces may appear to be, they all share a common ambition: that is to abandon the idea of any pre-existing space in which things are embedded for an idea of space as undergoing continual construction exactly through the agency of things encountering each other in more or less organized circulation. This is a relational view of space in which, rather than space being viewed as a container within which the world proceeds, space is seen as a co-product of those proceedings.<sup>14</sup>

#### **3.6.5.1 Ethics**

I like to imagine theory as a thinking space. I think of theory and its space.

Who made it? What is their story? Who uses it? Is it a space of emotion? Is it a space for emotion?

I imagine theory as something other, outside of me, almost concrete, a body of knowledge, a body made of thinking bodies that think about something alive, alive in them. I enter this space and I begin to think from it, with it about something alive, something alive in me. Theories must therefore be made of life and, as such, they are fluid, elastic, alive. Why do they not feel like that? I imagine theory as an old man, sometimes a woman, with old polished shoes, a watch is tightly tied around his wrist, a freshly ironed shirt with a hard collar that pushes against his neck, his neck pushing against the collar, hard white collar, clean, clean, it is clean of life. Theory is made of lives, of life after life after life, making a hard, thin, transparent membrane that insulates it from life, from itself. I cannot hear its voices, and my voices do not reach through. Theory sleeps. I need to take it down as silently as possible so as not to wake it

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<sup>14</sup> Extract from a writing for supervision on what is (my) data.



and to try it on. I will look at the children with it for a moment and I will put it back as I found it. The children, will go on being without it, so will I.

For Freud, theory is about displacement and rivalry:

it is about being better placed than someone else (Phillips, 1998:19)

Centred in loss, curiosity, knowledge or theory-making is the child's wondering about their place after the arrival of their sibling or of other people (Phillips, 1998). In search of its place, theory becomes forgetful of the life in it. In search of a theory, of a meaning, of a place, I become forgetful of the other in my writing.

There it is, space and place interchanging again.

Theory as a space, into which I go, and think about the children. Theory, as a place, in which I belong, and think about myself. Theory as a space, as Massey's (2005) space, relational, plural and becoming, is productive, it looks inwards for a sense of the other. Theory as a place, Freud's place, is insecure, it looks outwards for a sense of self.

Is theory then an already-made entity, fixed, done, dead, that meaning, life, the children need to adapt to? Or is it something alive, so alive that is reinvented in each encounter with an other?

I think that it is this concern that partly drove this present research: the question of bringing together two lenses to think about the children with whom I worked, the children I observed, the child I am. This concern is, in turn, driven by a resistance to render a plural moment to one meaning, (a child's) life to theory. Perhaps, in thinking of theory as an old, ancient man with a white shirt with a hard collar and a tight watch, what I resist is the authority of the father or - paradoxically enough for a research on meaning making - meaning making itself. That is to introduce language - or else the father - to the felt moment, or else to the prior mother-infant oneness.

I find that the idea of a space –either the space in between two theories or of theory as a space that is relational, plural and under construction- relieves my concern. It invites me to engage with theory as life-to-life.

The aliveness of the theory as a space lies in its temporariness. I enter the space of theory and theory enters my space. Plugged into each other (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013), mutually dependent on each other, we enter each other to create new meanings, new thinkings. Temporary and historical and local. Plugging a text into another (theory, the stories I write

about children, the (hi)story I bring with me in my reading of theory and the writing of the children) is a way of thinking of text as a space that is alive and relational. Meaning is made out of these spaces coming together. How can spaces come together to make a meaning without touching each other, without changing and being changed by each other? Alongside creativity, meaning making from a relational place declares its boundedness. For Winnicott (2005) the act of interpretation is a way to let the other know the limits of his own interpretation.

I have imagined theory, individually, as a space. If I step into the space in between my theories, theories turn into places. Theories become places in relation to a wider space that encompasses them. How is theory as a place? I choose it. It is chosen by me. It is inhabited by my history, my body, my purpose. It is lived. Casey (1996: 26-27) says:

a place is something for which we continually have to discover or invent new forms of understanding ... rather than being one definite sort of thing, for example physical spiritual cultural social, a given place takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description and expressing them in occurrence as an event, places not only are, they happen

The space between places, between theories, between psychoanalysis and existentialism is a space that I think of as plural, relational and becoming. Moving between places feels freeing but can also be thought of as a space free of context or empty of content, or as a way to resist commitment. In thinking of theory as a space that is alive and temporary, associational and inexhaustible, *and*, in opening up the space to move between places/theories, I am not trying to emphasise the relativism in theory but the self in it and the different selves it brings with it. This might also be true for suggesting an existential perspective (that looks for the plural, the relational and the becoming) alongside a psychoanalytic one (that looks for personal history). Massey (2005:14) says about a spatial turn:

It sometimes seems that in the gadarene rush to abandon the singularity of the modernist grand narrative (the singular universal story) what has been adopted in its place is a vision of instantaneity of interconnections. But this is to replace a singly history with no history – hence the complaint, in this guise, of depthlessness. In this guise, the ‘spatial turn’ were better refused. Rather we should, could, replace the single history with many

With the above metaphor I consider how different spaces (theory, an existential moment, people, selves but also inner states and the unconscious) were plugged into each other beyond the specific time of writing my analysis, during the observations, in

remembering, writing and reading them. I consider how analysis, beyond being a place of playing with different meanings, became a writing as inquiry into such plugging, intentional or not, as well as my emotional and ethical response to it.

### **3.6.6 Process of analysis: a descriptive recollection of gaps and steps**

September 2014: I have now finished my observations. I go back and read them again. Each separately and all together, one next to each other. I look for meaning and I do not look for meaning. I allow myself to note sentences or moments that do something to me. I note associations or threads or memories or theories or people that come to mind: Camus' Stranger, my mother, Klein, a moment from my childhood. When I finish my observation, I feel unease with the different spaces/places that my fieldwork encompasses. Observing, remembering, writing, reading and, now, writing again. And what about all the in between spaces? The discussions with my supervisors, with my friends, my dreams, life as it continues to happen and to permeate, to accompany, cannot help but be in my observing and my writing, in what I remember and what stays with me as I read. What about all the spaces that the writing encompasses? The moment, the self, the selves, the other, the inner, the inner in between, the theory. I need to find a way to make sense of them, to encompass them in the writing of my analysis. I turn to geography and try to symbolise them by means of a spatial metaphor: I imagine them as concrete spaces/places that I enter or that emerge and with which I engage in dialogue. Thinking of these concretely allows me to imagine them in different constellations. In one of my readings on emotional geography, I come across Gaston Bachelard. I go to his poetics of space and then to his poetics of reverie. As I read him, May comes to mind.

What is it that brought them together?

In my writing, I recall a moment of reverie towards my childhood in the presence of May: Bachelard speaks to it. I like how I stay with May, intimately and devotedly, all over again, a little more in the face of her loss. I liked opening up a moment that we had together and inviting Bachelard in to help me imagine what happened in it. I want to stay in this way with the rest of the children, with Eilidh and Edward.

Why have I chosen to write about these three children thus far? When, since our first encounter, did I decide this?

December 2014: in one of my discussions with Liz, she responds to something I say with an image of Baba. I have forgotten her and Liz holds her in mind. I feel the space opening up

even more. During that same discussion, I make a mistake and speak about my four children instead of three. I make the same mistake in therapy. Some days later, I wake up to the thought of a fourth child. Camus' *Stranger* comes to mind as he emerged in my time with Nadia. I trace him in the observation that he first appeared before I read over our time together with Nadia in his light; I write it in order to make sense of it.

I can write about Eilidh now. I do not. I go to Edward. He is the only boy. Perhaps Mr Mersault, Camus' *Stranger*, invited him in. Perhaps he is strong enough to stop all this loss or other enough to put a boundary. Loss, Edward, Jonathan: 'I don't want to lose Edward'. Perhaps I want to invite Jonathan in and see him, like Liz, holding one of the children. I read over my observations and I see him playing hide and seek. Do you still see me if I am not there? Laing comes to mind and that place between the psychoanalytic and the existential.

I do not feel ready to write about Eilidh. My dad has a very bad cold. I think of Baba. She, too, was not ready to leave the nursery and grow out of it. I am holding on to her holding on to the children a little more holding on to life, resisting another ending. Klein is with us.

I go to Eilidh. I read my observations and I feel lost. Why did I leave her until last? I lose her in amidst her costumes; I cannot find one small piece of her that I can hold on to. She is plural. What of her drew me in readily? She gave me what I went there for. She mothered me. I feel uneasy. Did I ever meet her outside my need? I stay with her/our mirroring selves and write from/with Fernando Pessoa's heteronyms. He, too, escapes being exhausted in a single self, name, reading of mine.

The above narrative is not intended to be an exhaustive account of the process of my analysis. Recounting the steps reveals those other spaces, the empty spaces, the unattended, unanswered spaces in between the steps. This retrospective account exposes the messiness in the inconsistencies and the gaps that permeated my analysis, and the time that I took to be the time of my analysis. Analysis has been a further writing on my writing. As a task, this has occupied a specific time and space in the context of my research. As a process, however, it embodied other spaces and times, places and people, inner states and selves, narratives and theories that do not know each other but dialogue with each other entwined and interlaced in diverse manners, less or more conscious. I can go as far as addressing that messiness and imagining threads and stories and interconnections that speak to where I am at this given time and from the lenses that I have chosen to see them through in here.

## **Chapter 4: The children**

The names of the children are pseudonyms but are more real to me than their real names, which I cannot easily recall anymore. Their names were born out of my first impressions of them, imaginings, imprints, implicated in my unconscious. Afraid that I will lose them in the 'im-', devour them as I take them in, make them mine - new - by naming them, I held on to the initial letter of their name as they said it to me, like an umbilical cord that will not let me go too far from them and will keep on taking me back to them if I lose my way.

May, four and a half years old:

Beauty. May is beautiful. Her beauty is hurried, serious, kind, and unaware of itself. A beauty I returned to and did not grow out of. An adult observing a child's beauty. All children are beautiful. But my child is more beautiful than others. What is beauty? Youth? Life?

The blue gaze. The pondering gaze. Caught by the outside, yet travelling within. Deep and hard, yet clear of frowning.

The dwelling pause, just before she speaks.

Strong voice. Grounded. Untamed. Kind. *'Excuse me'*. Pause. *'Can you be our mummy?'*

I join her. She asks me as if I know where she was before she came. She tells me as if I have asked.

Nakedness.

Her friend, Amy. Her love of her friend.

May's name came to my mind instantly, almost naturally. Her real name feels alien.

Nadia, four and a half years old:

I did not choose you. You chose me. I had forgotten you but you came back one morning in a waking dream. My fourth child. How could I forget my child?

Nadia. N. N-. N-o. No. No, I will not play. No, I will not laugh. Stra-N-ge. Stra-N-ger.

How can you be my child and be a stranger? How can you be a child and be a stranger?

Can my writing make you less strange-r?

Edward, four and a half years old:

He sees something that I do not. We look at the same picture, but he sees something that I do not. He does not say what. He looks at me - my eyes are hooked - and he begins to walk. I follow him seduced to the drawing table. We sit. He makes a cylinder and he looks back at me through it. He laughs.

Then, his lips are firm. His voice is soft but he does not speak. He sees and he thinks, mostly. In his firm lips, I think I see his mind. He thinks and as he does he looks at me; he keeps his eyes on me, sometimes this feel painful.

*'Maybe you can come on Fridays when Edward is also in'.*

Edward's name brings to mind England, kingdom, sword, words with hard consonants that try to outdo each other, while next to each other, in my mind they produce a gentle but firm sound, a gentle war, a silent authority.



Baba, five and a half years old:

She is the oldest. Her voice is the loudest. She is interested in me, yet she resists me. She observes me and then she rushes out to play as if she was late and her friends have been waiting.

She names death.

She wears colourful clothes.

Her eyes are smiley.

Her real name means beautiful in an-other language.

She is the only child that named death during my stay there.

She is the only child that left the nursery only to come back again. She could be Valerie who had one more year at the nursery. She could be me, holding on to Valerie. She could be me, coming back with/in/from her. She is my second chance to do it right.

Eilidh, four and a half years old:

*'The world is small without my glasses'*. She comes and she speaks and she goes. It is my first day at the nursery. She gives me what I am looking for. What I am looking for still exists. It exists and she can still name it. She can name it and I can still register it. I stand amazed. Surprised. The last time this happened was over a year ago. I returned to be surprised again and surprise comes and finds me, surprises me and goes.

Apart from worlds, Eilidh also plays with words. She plays with objects. She can play. She has the space within to wonder and to play. She has the space within to come to me and she has the space within to leave. She can come and she can go.

As she does, she takes with her my self that wants to know, my self that is afraid to know and my self that does not know how to know. They are with her now. I meet them each time I meet her.

Eilidh wonders about the world. She wants to tell me. What is world to her? I return to know.

Her name is full of vowels. Vowels are open. Open to take in. A vowel can wonder, it can cry, it can laugh. 'Ei' - like 'it is so nice to see you', 'Ei' - like 'you came', 'Ei' - like 'I was waiting for you'. L. Eilidh's name has only one pronounced consonant. It is soft. It stands. Sometimes it stands still, others it stands up for itself. L is the initial of Liz. It has her in it. There are two other consonants but there are not really. They are at the very end but they are not really there. Where are they? They protect Eili- from the east but they don't need to tell.

In the writing of my notes, Eilidh's name appears as an error. The only wrong name, the only wrong word. There are times that it is the only wrong word in the whole document. It stands there, red and underlined. It resists correction and it remains unrecognized.

## **Chapter 5: Reading, dreaming, writing, asking, playing, thinking with: reliving my observations kaleidoscopically**

### **5.1 May**

December 2014:

I am about to start my analysis. The children are now already well into their first year in the primary school. I cannot know this but I imagine they are. I have not seen them since August but I imagine them in their new place sometimes. I am about to go back to the nursery to stay with them again, to think and to write about them. To recall our encounters, that is, to make our encounters, to encounter them, to encounter each other all over again.

Old and new, what is this space made of?

From there, I write about them, about me - I write them, me. This space is a space between the old and the new, between them and me, it is both old and new, them and me, it is us, now, in this moment and in this space. It traverses the trajectory of the observed, the remembered, the written, the spoken, the read, the thought, the written about; or else of my observation, my memory of the observation, my writing of the observation, my speaking of my writing with my supervisors and my friends, my reading over my writing, and, now, my writing about my writing. The trajectory of these spaces is trespassed by these other spaces, the 'my' in my activity: my interest in the existential, my (hi)stories and my unconscious wishes and fears, what I know and what I don't know and is present.

Space emerges strongly in my writing of my observations. Perhaps it was there in my observations but I am able to see it only now - symbolised, articulated, named. Jonathan names it and I hear it - I hear it from an other and it becomes real. I go to geography. Geography is Liz's background. I go to her. Not only to her, even further; in my phantasy I am going over to where she started from. In a paper by Chris Philo (2003) on the emotional geographies of children I come across Gaston Bachelard.<sup>15</sup>

#### **5.1.1 Phenomenology of the in-between**

In his *Poetics of Space*, Bachelard (1994:206) writes:

But then, we ask, why did Diore, who is a psychologist as well as an ontologist of under-seas human life, go into the desert? As a result of what cruel dialectics

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<sup>15</sup> Extract from personal notes

did he decide to leave limitless water for infinite sand? Diöle answers these questions as a poet would. He knows that each new contact with the cosmos renews our inner being, and that every new cosmos is open to us when we have freed ourselves from the ties of a former sensitivity. At the beginning of his book, Diöle tells us that he had wanted to 'terminate in the desert the magical operation that, in deep water, allows the diver to loosen the ordinary ties of time and space and make life resemble an obscure, inner poem'. At the end of his book, Diöle concludes that 'to go down into the water, or to wander in the desert, is to change space', and by changing space, by leaving the space of one's usual sensibilities, one enters into communication with a space that is psychically innovating. 'Neither in the desert nor on the bottom of the sea does one's spirit remain sealed and indivisible'. This change of concrete space can no longer be a mere mental operation that could be compared with consciousness of geometrical relativity. For we do not change place, we change our nature

Bachelard names an in-betweenness and a desire for a movement to and from. His passage speaks to me, now, as I stand in the middle, in the muddy uncertainty and the smallness of the in-betweenness of my two theories of meaning. I do not know much about the water. Neither do I know about the desert. I read. There is, this sea of landscapes, words, words on other words, on other words, infinite and tangled. I open my hands and I try to feel the edges of both, from one side to the other, but my arms are small and my hands are small.

I go to the water. I need to stay longer in it. Water is the mother, the womb, oneness. Meaning in psychoanalytic thinking is constructed around an instinct, an object, a relationship. It feels almost tangible. I can name it, dream of it and resist it. I can question it and in doing so I confirm that it exists, that it is alive and that it survives my questioning.

I go to the desert. I need to walk more on it. There is the infinite space and the littleness of a grain of sand. Sameness. Despair. I walk on a little more. It is not meaning that I get closer to but sand. More sand. The colour of the sand in the evening, in the morning, its texture below my feet, its smallness, the lines and the curves that unfold before my eyes, uphill and downhill and uphill again. My attention to the sand: its colours, its texture, its shapes. Is such attention existential? Or phenomenological? Is the phenomenological existential? Is it innocent of phantasy? Free of theory? Is the phenomenological existential if I arrive at the moment with the child interested in the existential? Is it psychoanalytic, if I arrive invested in psychoanalysis? Is phenomenology, then, a theory or a method?

Fiut (2009:343) reads in Camus the proposition that the task of phenomenology is not to explain the world but to describe the experience of the world:

Thinking is learning all over again how to see, directing one's consciousness, making of every image a privileged place ... From the evening breeze to this hand on my shoulder, everything has its truth. Consciousness illuminates it by paying attention to it. Consciousness does not form the object of its understanding, it merely focuses, it is the act of attention ... Consciousness suspends in experience the objects of its attention. Through its miracle it isolates them. Henceforth they are beyond all judgments. This is the 'intention' that characterizes consciousness. But the word does not imply any idea of finality; it is taken in its sense of 'direction': its value is topographical

In the Zollikon seminars, Heidegger discusses the necessity to encompass the being of the human beings in our analysis. In existential-ontological phenomenology we enter into a relationship with what we encounter, a relationship in which, yet, we have always been dwelling (Von Herrmann, 2005:166)

Heidegger speaks about *entering* into the phenomenological way of thinking. To me 'entering' is both, inclusive of the self and active as a method. I think that it is the nature of the existential that asks (me) for this kind of engagement and this kind of interiority. Where can I trace the existential apart from the things themselves as they lie still, patient, worldly, wordless? How do I treat it, take it in, stay with, form and word it? Arriving at the moment with existentialism as a theory, I close the moment down. In stepping into existentialism, I step away from the moment, the echo of the moment, the nuance, the light, the colours, the skins, all those details of the moment wherefrom an existential quality might be traced and unearthed. Speaking about an existential moment from an existential perspective resists itself because it speaks directly about it, thus separating itself from it. Arriving at the moment phenomenologically I arrive with myself, with my experience of the moment. Phenomenology allows me the space to stay with the moment longer, long enough so that it begins to break open into its shapes, its qualities and its imaginings where the existential might begin to breathe. It is a way of asking to know more by staying longer. It becomes a second observation, an exercise in attention, in staying open, asking and asking again. Can the existential quality be unearthed by looking, in looking, more looking, in the very act of looking, that is, in doing, rather than in finding?

### **5.1.2 Bachelard and May**

In his *Poetics of Space*, Bachelard (1994:224) discusses drawers, nests, shells, corners, miniatures, inside and outside, immensity and roundness as objects and spaces that concentrate life and human meaning:

How concrete everything becomes in the world of the spirit when an object, a mere door, can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect. If one were to give an account of all the doors one has closed and opened, of all the doors one would like to re-open, one would have to tell the story of one's entire life

The idea of space as charged with life and implicated in questions about the very being is also found in an existential response to human geography that finds meaning in space as:

a sign to something beyond itself, to its own past and future, and to other objects  
(Tuan, 1971:184)

Bachelard's phenomenological attention to space allows the existential to begin to surface in the everydayness. There is the poetic in the concrete, the object invested in phantasy. His thinking brings something together and as I read him I begin to think about May. His writing brings to mind her play. What do they share, where do they meet in my mind? What is it in my experience with May that resonates with my experience with Bachelard as I read his work? Both are fresh, bright. There is a throwness in the way they are, a generosity in their doing: her play flows, his narratives play. Both play with their bodies and with words as if they are worlds. They move their attention constantly, they move with their bodies and their movement moves me and my worlds:

*May is walking through the bushes. She walks tentatively through the long thin edges of the branches and the plants. The garden is wild and rich, it looks like a small jungle; she walks carefully and gently keeps the branches aside as she passes. She finishes a first round and comes out. She stands in front of me and tells me how she tries to pass through the bushes. As she does she jumps and slightly touches my jumper and lets go; she is excited and keen and I feel engaged and drawn into her excitement. She tells me how difficult it is to walk without getting hurt by the branches and the bushes. I remember her game a couple of weeks ago when she crawled carefully so as to escape the rays and get to the waterfall. She asks me if I want to see this as she embarks on a new travel round into her jungle. I tell her that I will follow her walk from where I stand. I see her blonde long hair standing out, soft and gentle, like her walk through the edgy tangled bushes. Her legs look thin in her baggy boots but her steps are present. She comes out again and tells me how the branches hurt and how the leaves stay*

*on your hair as you walk. Her voice is hoarse and keen. She speaks fast and nervously and looks at me only at times. I notice her eyes for the first time, blue green, tender. I feel something sharp on my neck and I realise that the edge of a branch is trapped into my hair. I try to untangle it and she follows my movements with her eyes as she speaks. Her gaze is contained, almost mindful: she sees me without forgetting herself. She goes into the jungle again but stops and comes back to say that there are also bees and wasps in there but they are tiny and they don't hurt. That we are bigger than them and they don't hurt. 'Something hurts when it is big and strong not tiny', she says. 'See, when I do that (she slaps her cheek lightly) it hurts but when I do that (she slaps her hand) it doesn't. When I do that (she slaps her cheek again) it hurts but when I do that (she taps on her head) it doesn't because it is tiny. When I do that (she taps her head) it doesn't hurt but when I do that, when I clap (she claps with her hands) it hurts. So bees and wasps don't hurt because they are tiny, they hurt sometimes, but not much' she says and walks into the jungle again (Observation 7)*

As I attend to my observation of May's play I find that it is imbued with a physicality; a brave kind of physicality with which she experiences the world. There is a concreteness in her experience that is present in her tentative stepping, in the touching of my jumper, the hoarse voice, the aware gaze. Her experience is grounded in her senses. She pays attention through her own body; she throws herself in the jungle and she registers the marks that it leaves to her as she does. In this strong interplay between herself and her experience of the world, she becomes the world, the other, the outside that happens to her, slaps or taps her, which she then observes. Her walk into the jungle is a kind of phenomenological inquiry; she attends to shapes and sizes and degrees - the edgy branches, the sharpness of the bee, the intensity of the slapping - which are either physically sensed or implied, imagined in her experience with the world.

### **5.1.3 Bachelard's reverie**

Like May's walk into the jungle, my own walk into May's experience is a phenomenological inquiry imbued with both my senses and my imagination. Bachelard (1971:14) speaks of the phenomenology of perception as distinct from the phenomenology of creative imagination that is learned by means of reverie:

Cosmic reveries separate us from project reveries. They situate us in a world and not in a society. The cosmic reverie possesses a sort of stability or tranquillity. It helps us escape time. It is a state.

Space, here, is replete with associations. By looking at the phenomenologist's reveries, Bachelard looks to people his phenomenology just as peopling human geography looks to recognising the humanity of the geographer.

Reverie is a phenomenon of solitude located between memory and imagination:

Immensity is within ourselves. It is attached to a sort of expansion of being that life curbs and caution arrests, but which starts again when we are alone. As soon as we become motionless, we are elsewhere; we are dreaming in a world that is immense. Indeed, immensity is the movement of motionless man. It is one of the dynamic characteristics of quiet daydreaming (...) It is often this inner immensity that gives their real meaning to certain expressions concerning the visible world (Bachelard, 1994:202-203)

The dreamer's solitude is a kind of solitude that returns to the childhood solitude:

Times when nothing happened come back (Bachelard, 1971:119) ...Idle childhood, childhood which, by getting bored, knows the harmonious cloth of life. In reverie tinged with melancholy, the dreamer knows the existentialism of the tranquil life within this cloth (ibid:129) ...There are moments in childhood when every child is the astonishing being, the being who realises the astonishment of being. We thus discover within ourselves an immobile childhood, a childhood without becoming, liberated from the gearwheels of the calendar (ibid:116)

Within us, Bachelard (1971) says, childhood is a state of mind. It has no date - no physical date - and reverie does not look to recount it. Reverie opens up to blocks of thoughts and associations without the worry of telling a story. Yet has a season: it is imbued with textures and senses that are both personal and universal. He writes:

what sun or what wind was there that memorable day (Bachelard, 1971:116)

And elsewhere:

all the summers of our childhood bear witness to the eternal summer (ibid:118)



For Bachelard (1971), a phenomenology of childhood is possible by means of our reveries toward childhood. It is through our reveries of the child's reveries in her moments of solitude that we can get closer to the child's worlds.

Bachelard says about the communication between the dreamer's solitude and the solitudes of childhood:

We dream while remembering, we remember while dreaming (Bachelard, 1971:101) ...from an imaginary memory, I retained a whole childhood which I did not yet know to be mine and yet which I did recognize (ibid:122) ...a potential childhood is within us. When we go on looking for it in our reveries, we relive it even more in its possibilities than in its reality (ibid:102)

*May puts the pillows inside her tent. She lies down. It is dark but there is some light coming in from the cracks between the tangled straws. She looks up, the light falls on her like the light of the stars. It leaves its traces - patterns made of light and shadow. The moment is mute, she moves like an infant, an infant who observes the light and the shades, who knows the world out there because she dreams it, safe from her bed (Observation 25)*

In reverie, the child flies, rather than escapes, and knows an existence that is boundless and replete with possibilities, yet unique to her. For Bachelard (1971:107), it is the phenomenological gaze which, in search of the ontological echoes of an image, allows this uniqueness to breathe:

Such a phenomenological project of gathering the poetry of childhood reveries in its personal actuality is naturally much different from the useful objective examinations of the child by psychologists. Even by letting children speak freely, by observing them uncensored while they are enjoying the total liberty of their play, by listening to them with the gentle patience of a child psychoanalyst, one does not necessarily attain the simple purity of the phenomenological examination. People are much too well educated for that and consequently too disposed to apply the comparative method. A mother who sees her child as someone incomparable would know better.

### 5.1.4 Ogden's reverie

Bachelard's phenomenology in the form of reverie brings to mind free association. Like reverie, free association flows and does so from a space between memory and phantasy: it generates from and it is generative of memory and phantasy. Play in psychoanalysis is thought of as the child's own free association. Bachelard's solitude in his reverie brings to mind Winnicott's (1958b) idea of the capacity to be alone in the presence of an other in play. In my observations, I did not initiate or interrupt children's play explicitly but I did acknowledge myself as an other in the presence of whom the children played. Winnicott (1958b) speaks of an other who, in her continuity, is sufficiently consistent and non-persecutory to be taken in and to become a part of the child's internal environment. This allows the child the paradox of being alone in the presence of another: the child is, plays, dreams alone in the presence of (or in the absence of an internalised) an other. This also allows me, as the observer, to tune into a space of solitude where I can attune to the emotional shades of my observation, to May's and mine and the in-between. My thinking of May's play revolves around how I (am made to) feel and what emerges in me during her play.

In his discussion of the space between the analyst and the analysand in the field of psychoanalysis, Ogden, too, spoke of reverie. Reverie emerges as a new subjectivity that is created by the unconscious interplay between the analyst and the analysand. Ogden (1999:158) calls it an analytic third that is 'simultaneously a private event and an intersubjective construction'. Reveries are:

things made out of lives and the world that the lives inhabit...they are about people: people working, thinking about things, falling in love, taking naps...about the habit of the world, its strange ordinariness, its ordinary strangeness. They are ruminations, daydreams, fantasies, bodily sensations, fleeting perceptions, images emerging from states of half-sleep, tunes and phrases that run through our minds, and so on (Ogden, 1999:158)

For Ogden (1999), it is this very mundane and personal nature of reverie that makes it difficult to stay with and to consider as significant for the understanding of the analysand's experience. It is also unsettling: a reverie during the time of analysis can be viewed as precisely anti-analytic or unprofessional because the analyst - preoccupied and absorbed in his dreaming - fails to be present, attentive and receptive to the analysand. In the observational context, reverie during observation can be viewed as expressive of the failure to observe, that is, to *be* an observer and actualise my role. Ogden uses process notes of his sessions to describe - to

symbolise and speak about - his reveries with his analysands no matter how unrelated these seem to be. Reverie is for him an 'emotional compass' that he relies on, although he cannot clearly read, so as to think of his analysands' experience and the unconscious relationship between him and his analysands. Reverie arrives:

carrying for the analyst more the quality of an elusive sense of being unsettled rather than a sense of having arrived at an understanding (Ogden, 1999:163)

Reverie is untranslatable. Any understanding of the latent meaning of the reverie that is helpful to the analysis is not immediate but retrospective and comes with time:

The fact that the 'current' of reverie is carrying the analyst anywhere that is of any value at all to the analytic process is usually a retrospective discovery and is almost always unanticipated (Ogden, 1999:160)

Ogden's reverie holds something of the quality of Bion's maternal reverie, that is, the mother's capacity to sense the child's internal workings, a quality that resembles the quality of attunement or of maternal preoccupation that Winnicott spoke about. Taken to the analytic relationship, such quality is also found in the capacity of the analyst to play with the images that the analysand brings.

My reading of Bachelard's discussion of reverie took me back to a moment from my observations with May when - during her play - I drifted to a space of reverie. There were, of course, plenty of moments during my observations when I drifted away from the moment, thinking of the moment, entrapped in feelings such as impatience or anticipation or just daydreaming. Yet, this reverie with May has a distinctive quality that brings to mind Bachelard's reverie. This reverie does not take me away from May; it lands me to the moment while taking me away from the moment.

In the next section, I will present this moment and I will think of it with Bachelard and with Ogden.

### **5.1.5 Reveries with May**

*She walks back and sits on a tyre opposite Amy. 'I will sit comfortable and tell the real story', she says.*

*'Once upon a time', I settle on a tyre next to Amy; May looks at me and looks back down. I see her bright blonde hair, brighter under this sun, her blue faded gaze against it, she frowns a little, she moves her hand, she thinks. 'There were some people who went into a boat to go and find new places, and John Smith was with them', she pauses, 'who wondered what is so new about these new places. And they travelled and they got to these new places. And there was a bad guy who thought that there is gold there, but there wasn't. But he tried to find it because he thought it was deeper than ever. But it wasn't. And he dressed up in gold clothes and he was sitting on a pile of mud and he thought he was the king of the world. The end. How does the story end? I don't remember but we might end it here'. Pause. 'Do you know the real story?'. 'No', Amy whispers. We sit thinking. May, Amy, myself. May looks somewhere towards the slide. Maybe the slide. Its wooden surface lies under the sun, dry, yellow, warm, flat, solid. There is no movement. The only life are the voices of the young children echoing from the other side of the playhouse. I remember this moment. I can taste it in my mouth. I can taste the warmth and the blackness of the rubber tyres that lie under the sun for days, where I now rest my feet. I see my shoes closely: their texture is dry, tired, like the tyres; I smell - breathe - what they are made of. I have been here before. The warmth of the sun - is it warmth or dryness? - it is noon and something has just been softly broken off. A pause amidst the doing: I am no longer doing, I sense myself being. Everything falls into place in this moment, under this sun, and I can suddenly see it. There is a place for everything, everything is in place. Things rest fairly in their places: the tyres are where they should be, the hot wooden slide cannot but be as such. I smell the concrete dryness of the cement - is it cement or sand? Everything is as it is and somehow it could not be otherwise. I see this. I see me in this. I become aware of this moment, of things being in their place, fulfilled in their fate, complete, done. The only life is the echo of the children's voices on the other side of the slide. Do they not see how things rest under this dry sun and the passing breeze? 'May, is it going to be a dressing up party?'. 'No. Only dressing up for Pocahontas'. 'I want to dress up as a fairy'. 'No, you can't come', May's 'no' echoes sharp, 'The one who does the party gets to choose' (Observation 18)*

How many reveries dream here? At least two. There is May's reverie of John Smith, followed by my reverie of a place that finds its way into the one we are in. Perhaps this moment, as written in this observation, is a reverie in itself; another reverie that encompasses the interplay between our two reveries.

Is May's story my memory or my imagination? Is my story memory or imagination? This moment brings together memory and imagination in reverie. Bachelard (1971:120) translates Baudelaire in this matter:

True memory, considered from the philosophical point of view, consists, I think, only in an imagination which is very lively, easily moved and consequently susceptible to evoking with the help of each sensation, scenes from the past by giving them something like the enchantment of life

In my reverie of this moment, I meet May in her reverie, her fable. In it May, too, is interested in the real: 'I will tell the real story', she says, and a little later she asks, 'do you know the real story?'

To participate in the existentialism of the poetic, one must reinforce the union of imagination and memory. To do that, it is necessary to rid oneself of the historian's memory (Bachelard, 1971:119)

My other reverie, a reverie within the reverie of the moment, follows from May's reverie. In it, I travel to a familiar past that I recognize in the very concrete details of the moment: in its making; the colour, the texture, the temperature, the taste of the rubber tyres as they lie still, idle on the sand which is not sand, it is cement, and it is hot, or dry? I recognize my shoes, my eyes on my shoes, the tyres, my eyes on the tyres as I sit lazily under this sun, the tyres are not tyres, they are steps outside the door of the house opposite my house, a little further down the street towards my primary school. I stand at a threshold. I am somewhere between the past and the present, memory and imagination, May and myself. For Bachelard (1971:116-117)

The pure memory has no date. It has a season. The season is the fundamental mark of memories...these seasons find the means to be singular while remaining universal

My reverie begins to flow as soon as May turns her eyes to the slide and rests her gaze there: immobile gaze on a slide which is a symbol of flow, an object of childhood. The slide is empty. We are at an empty playground on a summer noon. We gaze at emptiness.

I dream my memory of one of those solitary moments when nothing happens:

I mean that deep, irremediable boredom which, by its violence, breaks reverie loose within us ...then there lives within us not a memory of history but a memory of the cosmos (Bachelard, 1971:119)

In my reverie, 'nothing' happens and fills the space. It lingers. If I stay with it for longer, I will find it dwelling on the objects and the spaces of which my moment is made. I break it open. In it, everything is as it should be. Quiet and solitary. Bachelard (1971) speaks about the tranquil sadness of childhood that, more than its joys, draws us to reverie. But is there sadness in this moment? It feels dry - dry of emotion? - and I observe it (not) happening almost indifferent.

The quietness falls over the objects. Objects - life itself - fall into place, *their* place. Yet, the moment begins to feel unbearable. There is nothing to worry about, nothing from which to make a meaning. In its concreteness, this moment is absurd. The cement, the houses, the steps, the tyres, the shoes. I lie still, I watch my shoes but I do not use them, the tyres rest, the slide is empty. I cannot escape the absurdity of this concreteness; still, dry and meaningless. It is only the occasional breeze that moves: a gentle effortless movement that confirms the stillness that surrounds me.

My reverie has a deadening quality attached to it: it progresses by deadening something: it grows by making something else dead. Is it attuned to a kind of nothingness that exceeds the singularity, the temporariness and the concreteness of the space in which it is momentarily glimpsed? Or is it a repression of an aliveness that is unbearable - not dry but wet, not still but alive - and needs to be mastered?

Can I find May's world embodied in my reverie? Does my reverie carry something of May's experience? Does May's reverie carry something of our experience of each other? Can I begin to imagine and to think of our unconscious intersubjective experience through the interplay of our reveries?

Ogden (1999) speaks of a dialectical interplay between the states of reverie of the two subjects.

I look back at May's story.

*John Smith looks for new places. And a man looks for gold.*

I look at May looking for something, looking for knowledge.

*What is so new about these new places? John Smith asks.*

Nothing, I respond. In search of new places I return to the past.

*The man continues his search for gold. He insists, he digs deeper, he finds nothing.*

I sit on a tyre, I look around, I find nothing.

*He puts his gold clothes on and he sits on a pile of mud.*

The sun falls all over me, dry, vain, it warms me to see it reflected on the black rubber tyres.

*He thinks he is the king of the world, he sits on the pile of mud, he sits on his mud, he masters it, he masters the unfounded new places and he masters the excitement that was not fulfilled, he sits on his excitement, he represses it?*

I gaze at nothingness around me as if it is something one bears to gaze; there is a quietness. I look at the surrounding objects with my omnipotent observing gaze: everything is in place. Is it?

*The only thing that breaks the quietness is the cry of the children, which is life itself. Hunger.*

Their cry begins to feel unbearable; is it the cry that I have repressed in my mastery over (the naming of) nothingness?

Looking at the interplay of these two reveries, I find that May's reverie of John Smith looking to find new places mirrors my looking at May opposite me and searching for meaning. My reverie points to an idleness, a stillness and a nothingness. In her reverie, May looks to find; in my reverie, I observe in stillness what does not happen. Their interplay asks: is there something to be found when one is looking? Is there something to be found other than the self itself?

May's reverie becomes a thread back to a moment in my childhood when I encountered nothingness pervading the space around me, exposing it - me? - to something larger than itself, something vast that remained pending and inexplicable. Although familiar, the time and the

space in my reverie feel immense in their emptiness. Is this something that May is, in some way, also in touch with?

My reverie tells an uneventful story. It registers the surrounding objects as they rest idly in their textures and their skins. Alongside the absence of events, there is an elusive sense of meaninglessness that rests with the objects as they themselves rest under the sun and amidst the breeze. A concrete stillness against a slight movement. A 'not doing' that allows 'being' to surface. This moment is temporary: untied to a history it comes to pass. It is also familiar: it returns from an idle warm dry noon that is known by my senses. Does it bring embodied in it an imagined memory of childhood?

Observing my reverie, I see that selves, times and spaces intertwine. They interplay and pose questions about the blurriness in being with May and in looking at her as an other than me. My reverie holds on to texture and temperature and light as kinds of umbilical cords while I move between the two different times and spaces. Senses seem to be at the centre of my reverie in place of a concrete story, opening up to images and qualities rather than to explicit meanings and interpretations. Perhaps meanings dwells in this sensory memory. It might be that Bachelard's insistence on the senses rests in that: in how they write within, how they endure, survive time and, like seasons, recover a whole childhood as an internal state. Pessoa (2010:105) writes about smell and reverie:

The sense of smell is like a strange way of seeing. It evokes sentimental landscapes out of a mere sketch in our subconscious minds. I've often felt that. I walk down a street. I see nothing or rather, thought I look at everything, I see only what everyone sees. I know that I am walking down a street but I am not conscious of it comprising two sides made up of different houses built by human beings. I walk down a street. From a baker's comes the almost sickeningly sweet smell of bread and from a district right on the other side of town my childhood rises up and another baker's appears before me from that fairy kingdom which is everything we have lost. I walk down a street. Suddenly it smells of the fruit on the stand outside a narrow little shop and my short time in the country, I no longer know when or where it was, plants trees and quiet comfort in my heart, for a moment indisputably that of a child

### **5.1.6 Discussion**

I have looked at May's play through the lens of reverie as discussed by Bachelard and by Ogden.



In writing about May with Bachelard, I felt that May's play was at home with Bachelard's phenomenology. That is maybe because May's play feels like a phenomenological project and Bachelard's phenomenology an act of play. Bachelard is not an existentialist but his phenomenological attention by means of reverie unearths the existential qualities that are inherent in being without directly naming them.

But does reverie not resist something in its poetry? Does poetry not resist something in its idealisation? Does idealisation not carry some sameness? Some linearity?

In his reverie, Ogden (1999) points to the movement *of* the reverie as opposed to movement *in* the reverie and to the fluidity of such movement. He looks at the complexity and the incompleteness of the unconscious interplay that leaves one unsettled in constant motion. He says:

My intent has not been to be exhaustive in the explication of unconscious meaning, but to provide something of a sense of a rhythm of the to-and-fro of experiencing and reflecting, of listening and introspection, of reverie and interpretation, in analytic work that views the use of the analyst's reveries as a fundamental component of analytic technique (Ogden, 1999:197)

Bachelard (1994) speaks of the dialectics between phenomenology and psychoanalysis as dialectics between exaggeration and reduction. Thinking of May's play with Bachelard's phenomenology alone, I miss the private ground that Ogden affords, which can be afforded only in relation to an other. Thinking of May's play only with Ogden's reverie, I miss the expansive attention to the immense time and space, to which both self and other are always subject. In search of meaning I come to think that while in Ogden's reverie meaning making swirls around an object, in Bachelard's reverie the objects (things, spaces, shapes, colours, words) swirl around meaning making.

Bachelard's phenomenological reverie embraces the idea of meaning as relational and co-constructed and helps me to stay and to work with the blurred boundary between May and myself. His reverie toward childhood becomes a thread to childhood, a communication with childhood that is inclusive and inter-subjective. It addresses the question of representation and otherness in research with children and stays with it. In his discussion of children's geographies, Philo (2003) discusses how Bachelard's reverie is a phenomenological project that looks to both an intimate connection with the child's worlds *and* the preservation of the

otherness of childhood in research. Or else, that the reverie - the memory and the imagining - towards childhood can only be dreamt from that 'other' place of adulthood. His poetics of reverie invited me to look at May's moments, her play, her stories as poetic images and spaces, to think about them and to open (them) up to their intimate details. His poetics of space allowed me an ontological discussion of spaces and objects by unearthing their existential qualities.

I looked my reverie with Bachelard in order to meet May's reverie, to trace the possibilities of an immobile, lingering childhood as it is carried along by means of memory and imagination. I broke open my reverie, looking to unearth its existential nuances as they dwelled on the physical space, the objects and the wording of the moment. My search brought me in front of more questions. Is reverie in itself an act of resistance to the moment and to what it brings with it? In search of meaning, I put May's reverie in dialogue with my reverie and I tried to trace how they carried each other: repressing each other and, yet, expressing of each other.

Both routes looked to get closer to May's story and her experience by addressing what emerged in the space between us. Thinking May's reverie with Bachelard, I used the reverie as my guide. Thinking it with Ogden, I used myself as a tool. A psychoanalytic approach to it points also to the specific limitations of this perspective in the absence of personal history, as is the case in my observations.

## 5.2 Nadia

*Nadia starts her picture by writing her name. Her full name. She reads me through it. She comments on Baba's name. Baba listens while drawing. She looks contained in her silence. Her hair stands out in her picture which is rich in details. Nadia colours tiny pieces in red and cuts them out. She says 'this is a smile' and leaves it in my hands. She cuts out more. Baba asks her what she is doing. She says 'it's a secret', and continues her work proudly. She sticks her drawing on the collage. She wants to stick each of the tiny pieces of paper, as well as the paper that she cut them from which is now full of holes. I look at it and I observe the traces of the cut in the holes. They have a bit of red on the sides. They are all painfully visible. The parts are there to be seen and the whole is there to be seen. They are kept painfully separate yet safely together. I relate to it as I recall one of my collages; I remember this need: the parts had to be kept with the whole, even though separate. (First visit / consent process)*

It might be that Nadia, in the very first day we met, offered me a concrete image of a process that would follow and that I would only arrive at five months later, now, as I begin to think of her and be with her again through my writing.

Nadia cuts out red tiny pieces of paper (of herself?), she hands me a smile publicly, and something else in a different way, less explicit, less concrete, painfully, secretly, through my body: my senses and my reverie to a moment in my past.

Nadia's experience of herself, her inner world feels at this moment to be more concrete and sensory and is expressed in an equally concrete and symbolic manner (Klein, 1997b). She cuts out and glues: splits and projects; as she does I recall this need to keep the parts with the whole and I retreat to that place where I, once, kept them safely together.

This first contact with Nadia was followed by a long period during which Nadia appeared sparsely in my writings of my observations. In addition to being sparse, my writing about her has also been monotonous. I watch Nadia as she wanders in the rooms of the nursery, as she becomes a stranger to me. The more I bond with Eilidh, May, and Edward, the more I estrange from Nadia. Her wandering in the space, in my space, feels increasingly painful as it becomes more present to my eyes near the end of my observations and Nadia's days at the nursery. The Stranger, the character in Camus' novel, joins her now.

Centred around projection and projective identification, I will look at Camus' Stranger, as a character through which I begin to trace the strangeness that was present in our time together with Nadia. In his writing on intersubjectivity, Brown (2010) brings together the emergence of Ferro's *character* with Ogden's *analytic third* and sees both as drawing upon Bion's theory of *dreaming*. Camus' Stranger thus becomes to me a narrative, a reverie, a character, an other, that joins Nadia and myself and points to a space, a strangeness that we shared.

My writing divides itself into four parts. I write about Nadia. I write about the emergence of Camus' Stranger ghostly presence. I ask about the stranger – who is the stranger? I think of strangeness and absurdity in relation to being at the nursery.

In my writing, I include some excerpts from my observations with Nadia. These are neither indicative of Nadia's presence at the nursery nor of Nadia's presence at the nursery during my observations. I think of them as mostly representative of how I related with Nadia during some of our time together. My choice of these is influenced by my attention in the act of wandering: how I have been drawn to wandering and its insistent presence, how it emerged, prevailed and survived time through to now coming to mind whenever I think of Nadia.

### 5.2.1 Nadia

In this first section, I present some moments with Nadia that are characteristic of how I related to her during the first months of my observations. In doing so, I feel that I lose her in her depth; that I do not take her in as I would had I attended more to the details of our interactions and the distinct stories of each of these vignettes or even parts of them. Still, for the purpose of this story, now, I offer these moments in their breadth, in my attempt to offer an image of Nadia, of what of her presence stood out, stayed with me and followed through to the point that I realised it in a different way.

*Nadia comes in, and her brother follows her. She is dressed up as a paramedic and her brother as a fireman. I haven't seen her for a week and I try to remember her name. She slows down as she passes by me and smiles. She stands and thinks and then goes up the stair to meet the girls. As she does she turns to me and says 'it's ok, you can watch me' (Observation 4)*

Nadia is not one of the children that I feel drawn to readily as I arrive at the nursery. I do not think of her on my way there or when thinking or speaking about my observations. The days that I stay with her are the days that Eilidh, May or Edward are away or when they are with her. I feel guilty for that. I feel guilty for staying with her younger brother whenever I stay with her; he has not consented to my observations. Not only guilty, I feel bad. I feel that Nadia is tied to him but I do not feel the urge to save her, to save them from their ties, to untie them from each other. Does a paramedic or a firefighter want to be saved?

*'No, we are not allowed', Nadia says. 'Yes, we are, we are allowed to take our clothes off but not our pants off, we cannot take our clothes out when it is too cold', May responds. Nadia stands blocking the entrance of the wooden house with her back turned on May; she looks at me -her gaze is indecisively shy- and uses her body so no one sees May's body. Then she goes in the house. May looks at me, she comes close: 'We are allowed to take our clothes off at the nursery, but not our pants'. 'Ok', I tell her. She goes back in. Nadia turns and looks at me, her gaze is now different, she smiles and her smile feels guilty, 'What are you watching? Why are you sitting like that?', she asks me. She notices her brother's grey cardigan, it has a stain on it. They go next to the washing machine, they stand facing each other and she begins to unbutton it. She turns and looks at me, her brother too, with a suspicious smile. May sticks her head out of the tiny room, her blonde hair cover her face: 'you cannot make noise in the kitchen, because I am sleeping in the bedroom'. Nadia whispers to her brother to be quiet. Shortly after, they leave the house (Observation 10)*

'What are you watching?', Nadia asks me and when she does I become aware of her standing across from me. I feel separate from her: she is looking at me looking at her. She cuts through my gaze. Her gaze, like her words, feels concrete, literal, it persecutes me and leaves me bare, stripped of my observer's role. My gaze feels strange, dirty, a stain on her doing and her being. Is this how Nadia experiences my gaze? Is she in touch with something of the strangeness of the observer or with some of the intrusive quality of the observer's gaze? What is so persecutory? Is it my pairing with May? Is this how she experiences it? Does she give me a taste of how she experiences it by enacting it? Or is it her pairing with her brother? Is it so strange that needs to be split and projected into my strange observing gaze?

It is observation 10. I feel ambivalent and defensive towards Nadia. I feel that I do not see her enough or that I see her too hard. This is how I relate to her just now.

*Nadia and her brother are still on the couch. I sit close to them. The room is almost empty. I feel displaced. Un-placed. Where should I be? I look at Nadia and her brother and I don't know if I should look at them. They lean quietly on each other, lean on the arm of the couch, their bodies lie silent in a cocoon, together -in oneness- they retreat to a lethargic, yet stronger, presence in the empty space, in the waiting. Like me. We share something of our experience, our emptiness today. Only their eyes move, they sparkle as they follow what moves in the room, their eyes outdo their body, they look out it and beyond it. I look at them and feel alert, but this alertness subsides, and my mind withdraws to a wander that I struggle to stay with (Observation 13)*

Nadia and me, we both look out the same direction today. I feel a little less separate from her now. We observe the room around us yet our observing is without an object. Neither Eilidh, nor Edward nor May is in today. Where should I look? Where can I look? My eyes wander alert. Nadia's eyes wander idle. Both our eyes are empty of an object. I struggle to stay present to this emptiness. What is this emptiness made of? Is it the absence of something or the not doing? Does wandering become present in the absence of something else? Is it an act or a quality? It pervades our space with Nadia and I find it difficult to look at it.

I am approaching the end of my observations. All this time I have written about Nadia very sparsely. The more I bond with Eilidh, Edward and May, the more I estrange from her. In my writings, she comes to me and she asks me what I am doing. Then she wanders off. I too wander away from her until I meet her again; this time I stay with her throughout one, whole observation.

### **5.2.2 Reverie of the Stranger**

*The red shiny wheelbarrow that I found outside the door last Wednesday is here again. Only less shiny. Also, today, it carries a couple of boxes – they are yellow, maybe orange, a shade of a warm colour that nests in my mind straight away. On the other side of the lane, the bicycle still leans over the wall. The child's empty*

*seat at the back is still empty. Not a day has passed. A man comes out of the nursery. He stands for a moment by the wheelbarrow and he sweeps his forehead with his arm, his black work shirt is sweaty; it is a warm day today.*

*Anne lets me in and we greet each other. I look out the garden as I walk along the corridor. I see some children but not mine. Steve, a staff member, sees me and waves at me behind the glass wall. There is Nadia and her brother, they stand under the sun and look at me as I walk along. Their faces look dry, their eyes half closed and they hold a drawing in their hands, each one.*

*The main room is almost empty. I leave my stuff in the boxroom and come out. I go to the garden. Steve speaks with someone. His voice echoes deep and distant. The children play but I don't hear their voices. There is a quietness. Their bodies are lazy, their muscles relaxed and their steps are slow. The light of the sun is idle. Nadia and her brother - they stand at the ramp, half way to or from the garden? Their bodies look like spikes in a field, long and thin, dry and weak silhouettes under the sun. They look at me. Nadia looks at me. She holds a drawing. Its white colour stands out from afar. I go over to her. 'Hello'. She doesn't respond, her eyes look at me, her mouth is lost. I kneel down. She makes a move, 'are you going down', I whisper as she begins to walk down the ramp into the garden. I follow them. I look around. She walks round the garden, from side to side. Her steps are wandering, they don't look for something. I am looking. I look to find one of my children. Near the swings, a boy calls me to show me how high up he can go. He keeps his eyes on mine as he does, 'do you see me?' I see some children inside the cottage house. They are not mine, they are younger. Nadia walks up the stairs. Her brother follows. I follow too. We left, just like we came. Wandering. Wondering.*

*Nadia goes over to the couch. Her steps are slow - they fall heavy. Perhaps not heavy. Perhaps tired. She turns and silently looks at me as she sits. Her brother follows her, he sits next to her, close to her. The outer sides of their arms touch each other. I sit a little further away. The couch is big. It is soft. It is light olive green. Sometimes it feels like a boat. Like an ark. When many children are on, it looks like Noah's ark. It carries. Today it holds. Nadia's eyes and her brother's eyes as they gaze around the room tired, resting on random faces and faceless movements of arms. How long can I watch their gazes wandering? How long can they bear to wander? I feel the eyes of the people in the room. I feel uncomfortable.*

*They observe me in silence, observing in silence, Nadia and her brother silent. I readjust my position. Perhaps I try to shake away the gazes and the silence. I lean my hand on the pillow - its texture is not what I thought. It is harder. I touch grains of sand on it. I imagine children coming from the garden and climbing on the couch with their shoes.*

*I look around. Where are the older children? Are they away on an excursion? Maybe they are visiting their new school. It feels like holidays, like those last school days before holidays.*

*'Mama, mama', Nadia's brother cries for his mum, his voice is thin, weak, like a bird's voice, an infant bird's voice who is warmly curled up in his empty nest. Nadia brings her face close to his face, to his ear and whispers something to him with her eyes open and looking at him. I cannot tell what she says, she speaks quietly, but her brother listens. Her brother. Nadia's brother doesn't have a name. He has been Nadia's brother since I met him, since I met Nadia. One with her, carrying her, carrying him, two, one behind the other, then a little ahead, walking wanderers, two wanderers that wander together, one, a pair, a couple.*

*He holds a horse stick and a drawing, each on each hand. The stick is dark red velvet and the horse's head is grey, woollen. She holds a drawing and a colourful chain of rubber bands. I can see some of her drawing. It is a drawing of hair, a person, a girl, a woman with very much and very long hair. I am left wanting to see more of it. I look at Nadia. Her face. I stay with her face. It is the first time I do. Her eyes are different, deeper into the skin, her mouth is bigger, she looks different, older, she looks like a new girl, a girl I haven't met yet. What has she been carrying for me, all this time? Who has she been in my mind all these days, week after week?*

*'Mama, I want mama', Nadia's brother says again. Nadia rushes to whisper something to him again, 'she...get...us', Nadia repeats something, in his ear, in the air. Then, she brings her face to his face, she looks at him very closely, as if she observes - as if she spies on him, he turns and they bring their two eyes close to each other that they almost touch each other. I see Nadia from where I am. She keeps her eyes open. Then she moves her body back, she looks away and turns back to him, as if by chance, she opens her mouth, as if she bites him, as if she eats him, he turns and opens his mouth, she looks at his mouth, for a moment I think they will kiss, they move their mouths as if eating each other and, almost*



*naturally, they retreat back to gazing away, gazing others, sitting next to each other with their arms touching each other.*

*She gazes somewhere into the room, her head is lowered and her gaze looks purposeful now: it has an object. She thinks, her gaze thinks. She forgets her drawing and I get to see a little more of it as it falls soft over her knee. I see the face of this girl, it is long, skinny, it narrows down the chin, it has two eyes, two blank circles, empty, blank eyes. An orange dress, with 3 hearts on in a row. A throat has squeezed in between the head and the dress, separate, fragmented, like an empty transparent bottle. And the hair, made with pencil, chains of curly hair, endless rows of curls, like labyrinths, like circles tangled with each other, they rise high up above her head and fall over the two sides of her body, surrounding her, enclosing her, drowning her. My eyes stay with this. Drowning or holding her?*

*Nadia's brother turns and looks at me. For a moment he rests his gaze on my gaze. His eyes are brown green, big, shiny, they ponder, wonder, they are two questions. What do they ask me? I suddenly remember his name. I remember someone calling him just a while ago. Mark. (Observation 24)*

September 2014:

My observations have finished. I go back to read them and as I arrive at this observation and stay with Nadia all over again, the Stranger -the character in Camus' (2013) novel- comes to mind. This is the first time that I name the Stranger. Like Mark, he, too, has been wandering in the nursery, wandering in my mind like an impression until now. Apart from unnamed his presence has been ghostly. Airy. Thin. Vague. Dreamy. Un-thought. This is the first time that he becomes a thought, a thought that changes into a name. He is there, by my text, a note on a moment of the observation. I write: 'Camus' stranger' – 's' in lower case.<sup>16</sup>

January 2015:

I decided to write about May, Eilidh and Edward in my analysis. I have just finished writing about May and I am about to write about the second of my three children when I wake up one morning to the thought of a fourth child. I make the same mistake in supervision and during therapy. Did I say four? My children are three, why did I say four? Who is this fourth child? Where did it come from? Why now? Where was it all this time? How strange. This child is strange, a stranger to me. A stranger. Camus' Stranger. Nadia.<sup>17</sup>

For me, Mr Meursault, the Stranger in Camus' novel, is the face of that wanderer who cannot feel at ease with being. A stranger to life, he wanders to wander off his feelings of estrangement

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<sup>16</sup> Personal notes

<sup>17</sup> Personal notes

to his own being. As he wanders, he observes his wandering, through the days and as they pass, he observes his life deprived of an emotional involvement, as if it happens *to* him.

What does Camus' *Stranger* have to do with Nadia? Why do I think - dream - of him when I am with Nadia? Their stories are different, how do they speak to each other? What do I name when I name him? How did he come to mind?

In his re-reading of Klein's and Bion's theory of projective identification, Brown (2010:670-677) traces an implicit intersubjective quality lying on wording, a mutual attunement where the analyst is attuned to the analysand's attempt to induce a response or else to create an emotional experience in the analyst and the analysand is unconsciously attuned to the analyst's mental states:

Permit me a moment of concreteness: if something is projected *onto* the analyst, then one may wipe it off one's sleeve as we would with lint. The lint may cause an emotional reaction, such as annoyance or embarrassment, but it hasn't found its way in through our pores. On the other hand, if an emotional state is projected *into* the analyst, then it has come to reside within him or her and cannot be swept away but must be dealt with by the analyst. The projection, as one of my supervisees once remarked, 'is free to mix and mingle with people in my inner world, to meet my parents, attack my brother, or even marry my father (...) The patient projects something (an affect, internal object, etc.), called the contained, into the analyst, the container, who permits entry of the contained for a period of time, the sojourn, during which the analyst "modifies" the contained through his reverie, which is an aspect of alpha function that acts to transform/dream the contained. Bion sometimes used alpha function and dreaming interchangeably, and he believed that we are dreaming all the time, while awake and asleep, that is, our minds are endlessly engaged in absorbing and metabolizing unmentalized experience that arises from within ourselves, from others conveyed by projective identification

Reverie can be viewed as a tool in the hands of the psychoanalyst who attempts to think the unknown (Bion, 1962). It evolves around projective identification and it looks to transform sensory experience, undigested facts or else beta elements to conceptual representations, visual images or else to alpha elements available for thought (Bion, 1962, Brown, 2010). This process allows for the potential of naming: for the unthinkable to be represented and for images to be spoken.

Reverie is the embodiment of an intersubjective relationship that gives birth to a creative idea or a shared unconscious phantasy of the analytic couple (Brown, 2010). It resembles the generation of Ogden's (1999) analytic third and Ferro's (2005) emergence of character in the

analysand's narrative which points to some kind of unconscious working. Can I think of the Stranger as such character? Does he point to something shared between Nadia and myself? What would his reverie tell me about Nadia's experience? Based on the interpersonal turn in psychoanalysis, what would it tell me about myself?

Ferro (2002:604) stays with the analyst to unearth a relational reciprocity:

However, let us not take only this 'pacifying' view, according to which the analyst's inverted reverie is always a consequence of the patient's projective identifications...I should like to postulate that, beyond the retrospective use we may make of everything connected with the analytic field as a reference to the patient's internal world and history, there may be an inverted reverie of the analyst that the patient can draw attention to and often 'treat'

Building upon Bion's work, Ferro discusses further the intersubjective quality of reverie:

To consider the oneiric in a session as a consistently active presence, as I stated at the beginning, allows us to work within a virtual space, a field that comes to life from the meeting between a patient, an analyst and a setting (Ferro, 2005:1540)

Relational psychoanalysis sees projective identification as an implied call for a relationship, a way to create an emotional experience in the other (Braucher, 2000, Brown 2010). Indeed, the Stranger called me back in the form of a waking dream and asked me to attend to him as he arrived late, yet insisting like the stain that Nadia was trying to wipe off her brother's cardigan. Naming it allowed for questions to begin to emerge.

### **5.2.3 Who is the stranger?**

Brown points to a detail that feels significant when it comes to attending the oneiric and to opening it up to its various possible meanings. He suggests that in the process of alpha function (the dreaming of the projected beta elements), what is introjected is not a maternal function and a capacity for reverie but an already intersubjective relationship (Brown, 2010). Baranger and Baranger (2008:806) elaborate on this:

The use of the concept of unconscious phantasy to describe the structure and dynamic of the bi-personal field is based on a structural definition of this concept. This structure cannot in any way be considered to be determined by the patient's (or the analyst's) instinctual impulses, although the impulses of both are involved in its structuring. More importantly, neither can it be considered to be the sum of the two internal situations. It is something created between the two, within the unit that they form in the moment of the session, something radically different from what each of them is separately

Thinking Camus' Stranger in this light, I understand that in my attempt to demystify him as a character I have to temporarily forget that he is one new third other entity that, although generated by Nadia and myself meeting at this time and this space of the observation, is encompassing of other persons, spaces and times. In order to break the Stranger open to his various faces and meanings I have to make up a series of boundaries - physical, spatial, chronological - assuming that if I took them down again I would have the Stranger back as it were. According to Baranger and Baranger (2008) this is not possible because the Stranger is not the concrete sum of these boundaries, Nadia's and my internal situations and projections, but something that resides between these two and is destined to be more unknown. But just like us two, the Stranger cannot be understood in isolation. I think that I cannot attend to the nuance of this in-betweenness if I do not attend to each of the parts, pretending for a moment that they are alone and that they are only parts. I will think of the Stranger separately with each one of the characters of this encounter, namely Nadia, myself and Nadia's brother. In doing so, I attempt to unearth the strangeness that he is burdened with, to restore it in each one of us and to consider its dynamic interplay among us.

My relationship with Nadia was permeated by a strangeness, either in my strangeness as an observer or through a waking sense of a shared purposeless wandering at the nursery as strangers to it. It embodied itself in the form of a reverie which, once named, allowed me to begin to unpack the strangeness in each of us as well as to begin to see faces of Nadia that were locked behind my need for her to remain a stranger to me.

What did I estrange from when I estranged from Nadia? Did my estrangement from her allow me to bond with Eilidh, Edward and May? Has Nadia been carrying my strangeness and guilt as an observer? Has she been carrying my longing to find and to 'know', as well as my impatience to feel less strange, less of a stranger, less different, less foreign, less adult, less intrusive to the flow of children's play, more included? Did she carry my own early anxieties that awoke in our encounters at the nursery? Did she carry my alienation to my own childhood, my distancing from my language, my wandering in a foreign country? Or was it the futility in a research project with children on behalf of an adult? When she calls

me, unnamed, un-thought, a fourth child that I did not acknowledge, gaze at enough and mother, does she call me to my guilt of being the third, the last child in my family, or to the fourth sibling in my father's family, a one-month old girl who died unbaptised after whom I was named?

Could my reverie tell me something about Nadia's experience? Attached to diverse situations, early anxieties are re-enacted throughout life. Observations can encourage such re-enactment: the observer is a third other that can awake early persecutory anxieties. Do I as an observer become a third other between Nadia and her experience, breaking an oneness that resembles the mother-infant oneness? Does Nadia project into my otherness, as an observer, an adult, a foreign her own otherness, her feelings of being different, outside; outside a dyad? Does my reverie of the Stranger carry something of her anxiety about the loss of her nursery and her imminent newness at primary school?

### **Nadia's brother**

In my writing, Nadia's brother insists on being Nadia's brother. I am oblivious to his name. He has wet eyes. The first time I hear his voice is the last time I see him. He offers me cakes for Nadia's last day at the nursery. Handmade, each in a careful wrap, they are neatly arranged in rows and on two levels that are kept separate by a thin white napkin. He passes by, slows down and stretches his arm out to me with a smile: he offers me a cake for Nadia's last days at the nursery.

The box has no lid. The top row is half-empty. A little more than half. His voice sounds fresh, real. I am surprised. I did not know he had this voice. I recall his cry - a different kind of voice - some time ago for his mum. It felt mute. I was mute and deaf to him: I did not speak about him or hear what Nadia said about him. I think that I resisted Nadia's brother, his presence, him, him monopolising Nadia. Perhaps his wet eyes, his cry.

I have seen Mark wandering with Nadia, next to Nadia, a boy without name, without voice, without a body of his own, neutral, distant and alien enough to be identified with Camus' Stranger: my remembering his name and naming him unlocks the Stranger's strangeness.

I have not asked for Mark's consent because he is below the preschool age and so I do not have his consent. Holding on to the strong ethical barrier, I do not think anything further of this. The ethical barrier is ethical enough to make me not think any further, but it is not enough

of a barrier to ban my observing. Mark is there in my writing, Nadia's shadow, Nadia's other half, they walk together, they look at each other and look after each other as a couple. He is there in my writing because he is there with Nadia.

What do I resist by holding on to the ethics of consent? From what kind of forbidden wish does my ethical obedience protect me? Of what kind of guilt does it rid me?

I did not think of Mark and Nadia as a couple until it was voiced in one of my supervisions. It is strange how, even though their strangeness as a couple is registered and implied in my observations, I did not think or speak about it as such until then.

Mitchell (2003) speaks of the absence of siblings in current discussions of psychosocial relationships. In the face of a vertical intergenerational parent/infant paradigm that seems to predominate in the Western male collective imagination, our first lateral relationships with siblings are often left out of the picture:

The baby is born into a world of peers as well as of parents. Does our thinking thus exceed the binary? (Mitchell, 2003:3)

A horizontal turn diverts our attention from the vertical Oedipal desire for the parent to the desire for the sibling. From there, one can imagine the child's incestuous or murderous wishes for their siblings in the light of instincts and objects. Both Freud and Klein have discussed the significance of sibling relationships and their intense emotional complexity early in their work: envy and rivalry in the face of the arrival of a sibling; the loss of the sibling; the role of the sibling in the family complex and its social and relational underpinnings in the person's life; and, the significance of gender and of birth order (Sherwin-White, 2014).

Perhaps I can think of Nadia as the older sibling that - in phantasy - her younger brother wants to have in order to be (Mitchell, 2003:4). Is his voice, which I hear for the first time when he offers me cakes for her sister's last day, expressive of such rivalry? Does Nadia hold on to him like the child who, longing for grandiosity, holds on to the phantasy that the younger sibling is more real than she is (ibid: 64)? Or perhaps an incestuous quality of Nadia's and Mark's play is registered in the dirty guilt I experience when I observe Nadia unbuttoning Mark's shirt to clear a stain.

Yet, more than that, Nadia and Mark stood out in my observations by the we-ness of their interplay. Shadows of each other, held in one skin they share a sameness that couples them. In this sameness, I struggle to remember Mark's name. Their we-ness has a static quality; so static that it feels solid and strong. Nadia and her brother are a couple that, in being a couple, exercises some power. In my writing, I do not separate them; I do not dare save them (a paramedic and a firefighter) from each other. Is there something about that being with another, such coupleness and sameness, that defends against intrusion, against separation and difference? In losing, in growing, in being confronted with a wider world, that of the nursery? In its union, incest is also the phantasy that both can survive if they become one; holding on to their twin fear, they say:

I am a we, there's two of us and only one of you (Mitchell, 2009:64)

In my writing, and in my thinking, I have not dared to touch Nadia and Mark as a couple. Ethics helped me with this. Why, then, have I chosen to stay with and to write about Nadia, given that I know that I will have to write about Mark too without his consent? Is this a way to separate her from him, even now, to think of her alone, to stay with her alone and in staying with her alone to be alone with her and together? Or is this writing still my urge to keep them together and not to separate them? How am I subject to their power as a couple?

Naming the Stranger allowed me to name some kind of strangeness, some alienation that was present and to begin to see other faces of Nadia. As if they were locked behind my own need for her to remain a stranger to me, they began to appear in some of the observations that followed observation 24:

*Nadia laughs. I turn to see her and I don't recognize her yet again. She wears a big hat and the string with the colourful rubber bands that she held on to all last Friday is now around her neck holding her sunglasses. But it's not these. She looks different because she laughs and she laughs with something - looking at something; her gaze and her voice have an end. (Observation 27)*

*She looks at me as I begin to read, I feel her eyes on me, I turn and I see her observing me, my hair and my face, maybe she, herself, now, like me, last week, struggles to recognize me, who is that woman who speaks? Is this her voice? Her language? (Observation 28)*

#### 5.2.4 Wandering - strangeness – absurdity

Why is watching Nadia wandering at her nursery so unbearable? Does her wandering make her a strange child because she is not *doing* something? What is so strange and so absurd about a child wandering, not doing or doing nothing?

*‘What are you doing?’*

What does Nadia ask me when she asks me this question?

Her question, literal and direct, cuts through a given position, a place, a state, a way, a way of being: Nadia’s question questions my observing and asks me to notice its absurdity. In doing so, she also asks me to notice the strangeness in the assumption that one *is* only if one *does*.

Nadia’s repetitive wandering at the nursery disrupts an order, a certain movement, a given way of being at the nursery where the child is constantly doing, playing, becoming something away from something else; separating and becoming, her hours are infused with a sense of purpose, a direction, an activity. Nadia wanders instead and her wandering feels idle; not tired from doing but empty of doing and indifferent to some kind of purpose. Is her wandering empty of an other - her mother - or is it attuned to an existential wandering? In Camus, strangeness, the absurd, resides in the day-to-day activity and in the person’s interactions with her natural surroundings; it unsettles the norm and turns the familiar strange (Curzon-Hobson, 2013). In strangeness, the subject is alien to the world, a stranger, an immigrant to a foreign land (Ucan, 2007). What makes the image of a child wandering in her nursery so powerful? Curzon-Hobson (2013) points to dislocation as one of the themes of Camus’ *Stranger*. Is the Stranger at home in the world? Is Nadia at home at the nursery? Allowing strangeness, a disruption in the order of things, a moment of inconsistency in their sequence, of nothingness amidst the given of the constancy of doing might also allow absurdity to enter the everydayness and to question the norm: is the nursery, like the world, a space of arrival or of becoming? Is it a space of becoming or of being? Like the adult, is the child alien to the world and in touch with such alienation? Can an adult bear to confront both the child’s and one’s own alienation in the face of a wandering, homeless gaze?

Nadia’s question exceeds the time and space of observation and dialogues with my place in a wider existential space. Nadia’s question questions me and her gaze gazes at me; her



wandering mirrors my own wandering that we share in the face, in the name of Camus' Stranger:

The journalists already had their pens in their hands. They all had the same indifferent, slightly mocking expression on their faces. With the exception of one of them, much younger than the others, dressed in grey flannel and wearing a blue tie; he had left his pen on the table in front of him and was staring at me. On his vaguely asymmetrical face, all I could see were his very bright eyes examining me attentively, yet without expressing anything I could put my finger on. And I had the bizarre impression of being watched by myself (Camus, 2013:77)

My writing about Nadia is replete with the word 'gaze', perhaps in place of the word 'observation'. Gazing, and my preoccupation with it, seems to prevail in our time. I think that there is a shared quality in the acts of gazing and wandering that seems to be spatial. Both the wanderer and the observer are at - act - from a certain distance. The wanderer is apart from the point of the departure or of the arrival and the observer of the object of the observation. Britton (1998:156) acknowledges the guilt in realising that the world needs to be loved and not just gazed at:

the necessary turning is from taking pleasure in an omnipotent control achieved by gazing at things, to learning to love that which has been taken in and transformed

*'Who wants to make a reindeer?', says Baba. 'Me', Nadia, 'me', Heidi. Nadia makes space and takes a paper 'we are all doing it', someone says, 'are you doing it?', says Nadia looking down as she tidies up the papers, 'yes', says Baba, 'no, I am asking you', Nadia looks at me, 'I'd rather watch you as you do it', I tell her (Observation 27)*

Nadia's call comes as a surprise to me because of the space that she makes for me and by unsettling our roles. I have longed to see her doing something that will rest her wandering, to see her *doing*, and now she is here, asking *me* to do something with her. In asking me, she is also doing something with my need to see her doing something. In asking me, she takes me in, she takes in my need to see her doing something, naming my attention to it since our early days together.

### 5.2.5 Discussion

What drew me readily into Nadia's wandering has been that trace of nothingness that I dreamed in her wandering gaze.

Perec (1999:33-34) writes about space and nothingness in his search of a space without a use:

I have several times tried to think of an apartment in which there would be a useless room, absolutely and intentionally useless. It wouldn't be a junkroom, it wouldn't be an extra bedroom, or a corridor, or a cubby-hole, or a corner. It would be a functionless space. It would serve for nothing, relate to nothing.

For all my efforts, I found it impossible to follow this idea through to the end. Language itself, seemingly, proved unsuited to describing this nothing, this void, as if we could only speak of what is full, useful and functional (...)

How does one think of nothing? How to think of nothing without automatically putting something round that nothing, so turning it into a hole, into which one will hasten to put something, an activity, a function, a destiny, a gaze, a need, a lack, a surplus...?

Nothingness intensifies when it wanders within a given space. I think that Perec's writing speaks to me about this. He points to the relationship between space and nothingness that is difficult to grasp and to stay with. Is the nursery/the world a space that we enter, expected to *do*? Is there space in the nursery/the world for nothingness? Is nothingness a space in itself? From the place of observation and interpretation, where I stand, can nothingness be a space? Can I think of the nothingness in Nadia's gaze and in her wandering as pure nothingness, a use-less room? How to expel meaning from seeing and writing, function from a room? Like Perec, I think that of the nothingness that drew me in in Nadia's gaze, I can only recognize that which was a stranger to me. Nadia helped me to make my strangeness something I can sit with for a little longer:

...I thought of the dreams I had had on this very subject, discovering a room I didn't know about in my own apartment.

## 5.3 Edward

*A boy comes over and asks me what I am doing. I explain to him and Erin and Heidi show him the blue tack. I ask him his name and then his age. Edward sits by me and takes a black paper and a yellow marker. He draws something, he looks at it and wonders where his drawing has gone (First visit / consent process)*

The times I spent with Edward felt mostly short and fast. Like snapshots. They often felt unreal. As I read over my observations, I find myself isolating moments and imagining them as performances. Isolated and deprived of continuity in time, Edward's play has then something serious, adult and absurd. Now, as I try to stay with him again and to make a story of our encounter, I feel resistant and confused. I want to stay with something that is only his, like his play, little and precise, enough in itself.

I long for some neatness. That is, for some autonomy and separateness. What is this longing about?

During our time together, I felt both a strong relational contact between us and a sense of Edward being more alone. This interplay took on various forms.

I saw Edward seeing me and recognising me, acknowledging my coming and drawing me in with his gaze. I felt seduced by his gaze and I followed it, following him. I felt seen and acknowledged by him as an other. Unlike with the other children, Edward's play felt sometimes explicitly directed at me and inclusive of me. I felt, then, that he attempted to engage me in his play, to play with me rather than play in my presence.

Other times, I saw him withdrawing and playing isolated and incomprehensible under my gaze. I felt my self being reduced to my gaze, my gaze objectified, tinged by a more concrete and less interpersonal quality. I wondered whether Edward spoke to *me*, saw me and whether I existed in front of his eyes.

Carotenuto (1989:36) speaks of gaze as an umbilical cord:

As soon as we come into the world we are obliged to experiment with preverbal contact. Immediately after birth one of the few instruments we have for understanding the world is our eyes, which normally meet those of others. This, in my opinion, is the origin of seduction by means of a glance. So it is that in their depth the eyes of the beloved connect us with the world. It is here that we once

again encounter unsatisfied desire. Just as in earliest infancy the dialogue of the eyes was insufficient to satisfy our need to understand the world by way of the other, so in later life the electric meeting of eyes both enthralls and underlines the cosmic distance that separates us from the other. It is as if once again we were not able to experience anything more than our loneliness

In his discussion of ontological insecurity, Laing (1965:41) cites an excerpt from the dialogue between the two tramps in Beckett's novel *Waiting for Godot*:

Estragon: We always find something, eh, Didi, to give us the impression that we exist?

Vladimir (impatiently): Yes, yes, we're magicians. But let us persevere in what we have resolved, before we forget

In our time together, there were moments that I felt ontologically challenged by Edward's play. These moments stand out now. I turn to Laing to think these moments with, and to imagine how Edward might have experienced them. Before I look at these moments I will present Laing's notion of ontological insecurity and how I think of it and work with it in my thinking of Edward.

### **5.3.1 Laing's ontological insecurity**

Laing (1965:41-42) thinks of ontological insecurity in the light of the subjective experience of being:

Biological birth is a definitive act whereby the infant organism is precipitated into the world. There it is, a new baby, a new biological entity, already with its own ways real and alive, from our point of view. But what of the baby's point of view? Under usual circumstances, the physical birth of a new living organism into the world inaugurates rapidly ongoing processes whereby within an amazingly short time the infant feels real and alive and has a sense of being an entity, with continuity in time and a location in space. In short, physical birth and biological aliveness are followed by the baby becoming existentially born as real and alive. Usually this development is taken for granted and affords the certainty upon which all other certainties depend.

(...) This, however, may not be the case. The individual in the ordinary circumstances of living may feel more unreal than real; in a literal sense, more

dead than alive; precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question. He may lack the experience of his own temporal continuity. He may not possess an over-riding sense of personal consistency or cohesiveness. He may feel more insubstantial than substantial, and unable to assume that the stuff he is made of is genuine, good, valuable. And he may feel his self as partially divorced from his body.

More than a definite theory that shuts down questions, I read Laing's discussion of ontological insecurity as a generative space that unearths and encompasses ontological sensitivity - movement between security and insecurity - as inherent in the everyday personal experience. My experience of reading the above passage opens up a space that asks with me when I ask about my sense of being in the world and my sense of belonging: do I exist? Am I me? Laing unearths and grounds such moments of passing agony by naming it; he relieves it because he de-pathologizes a sense of alienation that looks to find a home in pathology. Still, his thinking remains unsettling because it stays with being as something that is not given or known or static.

Laing's use of words such as 'more' or 'becoming' in his passage above offers a qualitative element, some fluidity, some degree and some texture in the experience of ontological insecurity. 'More' is significant of an ontological sensitivity; 'becoming' is non-linear. Laing exemplifies how diversified ontological insecurity is moving between, in and out, to and from, different forms, feelings and states. Perhaps ontological insecurity is not a spectrum in which we move, rather *our* ontological insecurity moves in a spectrum of diversity and degree. I think that it is in the very manners and the qualities that accompany Edward's play - the adjectives, the sizes and the rhythms, the nuances and the shades - that his ontological sensitivity can be traced in its interplay with his ordinary experience.

I will attempt to attend and think about the ontological quality of the space between Edward and myself, which is reflected in Edward's play and in my response to it. I will do so by revisiting some moments with Edward that are ontologically coloured. Instead of presenting each moment as a theme or a title, I have chosen to discuss them as I meet them over the course of five observations, reliving them in an ontological light. The reason for this is that they appear sporadically throughout my observations and I find it difficult to see their distinctive edges because they overlap and complement each other. Presenting them thematically would thus feel like I am forcing a boundary that is not distinct in my eyes.

### **5.3.2 Observation 6: 'Are we there?'**

*As I kneel down I see Edward passing in front of me, stopping and looking at me with a faint smile. He moves to the drawing table with his gaze and his smile on me. I just follow him.*

*I remember his face and his smile. I am sure he gave his consent. Did he? Something feels uncertain, unregistered, I am faintly unsure. Is he the same boy that made that picture in the collage? I remember the handwriting, the faint name on the black paper yet I have a feeling that this is a different boy standing in front of me. Still, I am sure I know him.*

*(...) He takes another piece of paper and cuts out a circle. He brings the paper in front of his face and looks at me smiling through the hole. He takes it down and brings it again on his face and smiles. He takes it down and whispers something repeatedly while gazing down. He sees me looking at him, he stops and says to my ear: 'anything. I say anything, anything, anything, anything'. He stops and says it again silently moving only his mouth before he whispers again rapidly to my ear: 'anything, anything, anything'. He stops and I say looking at him: 'anything'.*

This is the first time I meet Edward after the consent day, yet I feel like I am meeting him for the very first time. I find myself drawn to an interplay between memory and seduction: holding on to a vague memory of him, I allow myself to be taken in and along to the drawing table. Or, perhaps, this is Edward's chance to choose me following his consent.

His faint memory gives way to a strong relational presence, yet the interplay between presence and absence continues within it: he smiles as he cuts. I become aware of the interplay between his smile and the mastery over the scissors and the paper and his small, soft yet hungry cuts. I feel that Edward has acknowledged me as an other who stands opposite him and observes him as he cuts: his cutting has a direction, a recipient, it feeds my eyes, it feeds me and he is aware of this. When he cuts out a circle and looks at me through the hole, he mirrors something of my gaze but also captures something of what happens in being seen: he circles his face, his face is chosen and isolated and distinct from other faces around and looked at. In circling his face, he circles the moment of that gaze, that meeting, and makes it still.

I feel acknowledged by Edward because he acknowledges me as an other; an other who he then symbolizes and takes in. His capacity to take me in does not make me feel reduced to an object; what stays with me more in this moment is his capacity to symbolize his experience,

that is, to be in that intermediate space between him and me, a potential space between phantasy and reality.

The relational quality of this moment gives way to a more isolated moment when I feel Edward more separate from me as he gazes down whispering anything repeatedly. Does he speak to me? Has he registered me at this very moment? There is something about the repetition of his words that keeps me outside and does not let me in. What feels painful in this moment is not the separateness in itself but the very act of watching Edward in front of my eyes grappling with something incomprehensible. I feel tormented as I watch him tormenting his mind with a word which is not a word but a thought and a world: anything can be everything and nothing, it is heavy in its nothingness and I can get lost in its anything-ness. His repetition does not feel linear but circular and I feel the need to voice something against it, to put a stop to what feels like a dizzy vicious circle by saying anything myself. In voicing it, I voice something: anything becomes then a something even though it is called anything. In voicing it, I also voice my presence, I become present again, registered, I confirm that I hear him, that I register him; that he exists. That I exist. I feel the need to bring him back out of himself into us two separate others, to restore an otherness where he registers me as an other and not as an object whereupon he rests his gaze as he delves deep into something internally. The phantasy that lies behind my need is that of Edward getting lost in there and taking me with him.

Bion stays with the fear of the analyst:

When approaching the unconscious – that is, what we do not know – we, patient and analyst alike, are certain to be disturbed. In every consulting-room, there ought to be two rather frightened people: the patient and the psychoanalyst. If they are not both frightened, one wonders why they are bothering to find out what everyone knows. I sometimes think that an analyst's feelings ... are one of the few bits of what scientists might call evidence, because he can know what he is feeling. I attach great importance to feelings for that reason ... [but] what a shocking, poverty-stricken vocabulary it is ... I'm frightened, I feel sexual, I feel hostile – and that's about it. But that's not what it's like in real life. In real life you have an orchestra: continuous movement and the constant slither of one feeling into another. You have to have a method to capture all that richness (Bion, 2008:4-5)

I try to stay with this moment a little longer and to think about my anxiety as, possibly, a guide to tracing Edward. Did we share this anxiety; did we hold it for each other? Perhaps there is an emerging complex interplay between separateness and merging as well as between different qualities of presentness. In the moment that I felt relationally acknowledged by Edward as an other, I was separate from him. In fact, it was this very separateness that allowed us to meet

and relate to each other. When he withdrew, instead of more separate I came to feel merged with him and overwhelmed by an anxiety to restore our earlier separateness. How did we relate at this moment: as persons or as objects? Bondi (2014a:337) reads both in Laing's words:

The final sentence of the passage above suggests that he thought of ontological security and ontological insecurity as properties that belong simultaneously to the person and his or her world, to interior experience and external environment, to the world as perceived and the reality encountered

Did Edward need to withdraw from that shared interpersonal space in order to take me in as an object in a more internal space? Did we then move from an interpersonal separateness towards a different kind of meeting, that is a merging?

Taking a step back from the content of the moment to its sequence, I observe how for Edward a sense of relatedness was followed by a withdrawal, whereas in me a fear of merging enhanced the need for separateness. The moment that followed allows me to think more about that:

*He takes the paper with the hole and says that he needs to make a bigger circle, 'my head is like that', he says circling around his head with his hand. He cuts it bigger and then tries it on. It slips down to his neck: 'I have a paper around my neck!' He takes it off and brings it in between our faces. I see him looking at me, observing my face and then my head in an interested silence and with his steady smile and I get an intense feeling that he will now try it on me. He takes it back to him, and then tries it on me. He looks at me. His movement is gentle. Almost unreal, undone. I don't remember how he takes it off me*

Laing (1965:44) speaks of the anxiety of engulfment as a form of ontological insecurity that emerges from the threat of annihilation and non-existence. In it:

The individual experiences himself as a man who is only saving himself from drowning by the most constant, strenuous desperate activity. Engulfment is felt as a risk in being understood (thus grasped, comprehended), in being loved, or even simply in being seen

How do I see Edward? How does Edward experience my gaze? What does his play tell me?



Is my gaze objectified to be a concrete circle that is now around his neck, potentially threatening to him? To be engulfed is to be enclosed, drowned, eaten up, consumed (Laing, 1965). For Bion (1977:58)

being in sight is the same as being in the mind's eye and both are the same as  
being in the mouth

I read this as both being held and being devoured. When Edward symbolizes my gaze he has internalised it. I have been seen seeing him. Is Edward's gaze potentially engulfing for me? Thinking of engulfment in the light of our genders, I wonder if I experience Edward's gaze as a sexual gaze. In this moment that I feel registered by him as an object and not as an other, am I objectified by his male gaze? Is my need for separateness a response to the engulfing objectification?

For Laing, the threat of engulfment is experienced as a threat to the being of the individual; isolation becomes then one way to preserve one's identity:

Thus, instead of the polarities of separateness and relatedness based on individual autonomy, there is the antithesis between complete loss of being by absorption into the other person (engulfment), and complete aloneness (isolation) ... A firm sense of one's own autonomous identity is required in order that one may be related as one human being to another. Otherwise, any and every relationship threatens the individual with loss of identity (Laing, 1965:44)

Laing speaks about autonomy as a pre-requisite for interpersonal relatedness, yet I wonder whether I can think of the movement between engulfment and isolation as an interplay of positions in the context of an interpersonal relationship. That is, how in our encounter, Edward and myself, relate with each other in various ways, as objects and subjects and objects again according to our needs, moving in and out of security and insecurity and occupying different places in between. Laing's proposition above feels definite and exceeds the context of my observations, but his descriptions of the inner states helps me put into words some aspects of my experience with Edward. It speaks to my fear of being merged with Edward and lost down into his anythingness; to the movement between being seen and withdrawing; and allows me to begin to imagine.

Can I think of Edward's isolation and my '*anything*' as a protection from a premature merging, a reclaim of our identity? Can I think of his circling around his neck with the paper not only as both a symbolic representation of his experience and a control over it?

Later on, when Edward brings the circle out of his head I get an intense feeling that he will try it on me. I remember feeling fear while Edward smiles steadily. In moving the circle or else the gaze to me, Edward confirms my otherness and tests my capacity to be gazed at and potentially engulfed. More than protecting himself from being seen, I feel that Edward is interested in (and capable of) challenging being seen and testing whether I (he?) survive it and remain present.

*'Close your eyes, count to 10 and we will not be here'. I look at him for a moment, surprised, I take it in and I follow his sayings. I close my eyes and count to 10, I open them and I hear a voice under the table: 'Are we there?' 'No', I say. 'Count to 10 and we will appear again'. I count to 10, open my eyes and find them looking at me in silent laughs. The girl is excited. Her voice and her face are fresh, I feel her lighter and rounder now. They ask me to count to 10 again to lose them, and then, 10 more to find them. They are as excited as before. 'Count to 10, count to 100', Edward asks me. '100 is a lot' I say and he insists. I count in silence. '100' I say and they come out. The girl asks me to count to 100 again. I look at them hesitant, where will this go? Edward, is half hidden under the table: 'Count to 100, to 34, to 54. 54. 54. Loud. I said it loud.' He looks down and then away, somewhere at the room and down again. His voice is loud, louder, and he becomes aware of it at that moment. He becomes aware of his voice. Aware of himself?*

Edward acknowledges my gaze and plays with it, he tests me as he appears and disappears, as he becomes present and absent and present again. Can you bear this? Are you still here? What if I (make you) increase the time, the distance in between us, will you bear it then? Perhaps this is a way of controlling the earlier merging and withdrawal, by playing it and joking about it. His play with me is followed by a moment of withdrawal into himself, when he becomes self-conscious of his own words. This time his repetition of the word has the quality of realisation, of a focus on the self rather than of a distancing to me. In this case, what he becomes self-conscious of is his own excitement, his getting loud, louder. Laing (1965) discusses how we move in and out of embodied and unembodied selves as we try to manage our ontological insecurity:

The embodied person has a sense of being flesh and blood and bones, of being biologically alive and real: he knows himself to be substantial. To the extent that

he is thoroughly 'in' his body, he is likely to have a sense of personal continuity in time (...) In the unembodied position the individual experiences his self as being more or less divorced or detached from his body ... The unembodied self, as onlooker at all the body does, engages in nothing directly. Its functions come to be observation, control, and criticism vis-a-vis what the body is experiencing and doing ... (it) becomes hyper-conscious (Laing, 1965: 67-69)

When Edward stops his play and turns to himself he observes his voice as if outside it. Interested in it, he isolates it and separates it from his doing; he breaks something of the continuity of his doing in time. His voice, his loudness, his excitement becomes an it, small enough to be observed, and thus silenced. Does Edward experience his excitement as overwhelming and potentially threatening, does he need to retreat to a state of observation that ensures some control over it and thus some safety from it? Laing (1965:68) also points to the embodied person's feeling of guilt and anxiety as a result of his being 'fully implicated in his body's desires, needs and acts'. Can I then think of Edward's withdrawal to himself in the light of the embodied self, as a result of his being in touch with the anxiety of his excitement as it overwhelmed his body?

In his play, Edward moves between relatedness and separateness in relation to me. He plays with these, plays with their fluidity and their degrees; he stretches their edges and tests his presentness and his absentness. He tests his capacity to be present or absent, to stay present or absent, and tests what this does to me. He occupies the space between the embodied and unembodied self by means of his own body and plays; with his play he unsettles their boundaries. Laing (1965:66) does not see the embodied and the unembodied self as a binary that aims to categorise or to pathologize:

Here we have a basic difference in the self's position in life ... Most people may regard the former as normal and healthy and the latter as abnormal and pathological. Throughout this study such evaluation is quite irrelevant

Bondi (2014a) speaks of the ontological security and insecurity as a continuum that allows feelings of security and insecurity to exist at a state of dynamic interplay; an ongoing movement that, on the whole, affords us a sense of being in the world. She notes:

Instead, I contend that these ordinary experiences of insecurity are an ordinary part of ordinary everyday lives, which most of us feel at least some of the time but which are typically quite fleeting and which may go barely noticed let alone acknowledged (Bondi, 2014a:334)

Apart from the anxiety involved in the embodied self's contact with her desires, disentanglement from one's body is sometimes viewed as desirable or protective;

These two extreme possibilities require to be examined in terms of the way in which an individual whose position approximated to one or other of these possibilities would experience his relatedness to other persons and the world (Laing, 1965:67)

The interplay between relatedness and separateness, merging and aloneness as we flow in and out of them continuously is played out beautifully by Edward in the following moment:

*'I want to make a picture under the table'. He takes paper and pencils and the girl joins him. I see his feet coming out from the table. I hear May on my right, 'I am happy, I am happy', she walks barefoot to her tray, she puts something in and walks away. Edward appears suddenly in smiles. He brings back up with him his drawing, a face with big eyes and a sun. All yellow. He shows me the sun. He shows me his pencil. It is small, sharpened on both sides. He tells me that one side is better than the other. He looks at each side: one, then the other, then the first again. He says that both sides are better - two sides are better. Two, I say. He begins to make alternate movements with the pencil, quick movements, the pencil doesn't touch the paper, it is like a dream, a dance of two pencil tips, held on the same pencil – same body, that come together synchronized, for a moment they are one. He holds the pencil lightly and kindly, his fingers are gentle, fairy. He looks at me and looks back down at his pencil. I remember the light of this moment very clearly, it is grey, almost purple, a soft purple, it is coming from behind him as he sits in front of the glass wall. His smile is peaceful. Our eyes meet for a second and separate again, all in a flow. It feels almost unreal. He slows down. He stops. He gives me the pencil.*

*He asks me to draw a picture with it. I resist it. I encourage him to try. He asks me to count to 10 again. I do. He is gone. 10 more and he appears. I tell them it is time to go. I will see them next week. 'See you next week', Edward says.*

Edward looks at me as he moves the pencil fast and softly, and I begin to have the feeling that I watch this moment in slow mute motion. I do not see a pencil any more, nor two sides, what

I see is a movement, or better, the echo, the trail of a movement. Is this us? Are we these two sides, merging and separating, going into each other's place and looking at each other from there? Who is gazing and who is gazed? Who is observing whom? Both passing, none of them stays a little longer. Neither presence nor absence, neither separateness nor relatedness, neither you nor I, neither two nor one. What stays is the movement itself. This movement is a space.

Klein (1997b) thinks of the space between the paranoid and the depressive anxiety as not clearly demarcated: I cannot be one with you, and, I cannot be separate from you. The two positions are tightly tangled: the infant begins to work through the depressive position by revisiting paranoid-schizoid states throughout life. They stay in a duality that is negotiated ongoingly (Klein, 1997b, Davies, 2012). Winnicott (2005) speaks of the space between you and I, between phantasy and reality as a space of potential, a transitional space which is made of two. In it, the merging of two lies still. Laing (1965:53) describes a different kind of twoness, a perpetual oscillation between isolation and merging of identity. When two is better, something comes together. In being seen, something comes together and mirrors something back, acknowledged and confirmed. Laing (1965:53) discusses how the capacity to realize one's own separateness from another follows from the need to be seen as necessary for one's own sense of existence:

A feeling that one is in a position of ontological dependency on the other (i.e. dependent on the other for one's very being), is substituted for a sense of relatedness and attachment to him based on genuine mutuality

In my encounters with Edward the interplay between relational and more alone states is ongoing occupying various degrees and qualities. Both degree and quality stand out distinctively in Edward's play as he negotiates his sense of self around them.

### **5.3.3 Observation 8: A broken pencil tip**

*I see Edward looking at me. He leans shyly on the table and moves along while keeping his smile and his eyes on me. Holding on to my eyes he now starts to walk towards the drawing table. I remember this. I follow him seduced like I did last Friday. 'Drawing' he says.*

*I ask him how he is. He doesn't reply. He listens. He takes a paper and a brown pencil. He asks me if I know where Alison is. I say I don't. I think that Alison is*

*the girl who joined us last Friday. 'Alison likes me, Alison likes me, Alison likes me', Edward repeats fast and quietly. He looks somewhere on my right, over my shoulder, maybe my shoulder. He stops and looks at my eyes. He goes back to his drawing. He shows me the tip of the pencil; he says that it needs to be sharpened. He gets the twin hole sharpener and puts the pencil in the smallest hole. He keeps the pencil straight and twists the sharpener. He moves his whole upper body; his movements are slow but strong. His lips are firm, firmer at each twist. He takes it off and looks at it. He holds the pencil in between us at the height of our eyes. It is not even on both sides. 'I think I need to sharpen it a little more'. 'Ok', I tell him. He starts off again with the same firmness. I see Eilidh from the glass door at the corridor in front of me. She looks happy. She is putting her jacket on. 'I think I need to sharpen it a little more'. Same tone of voice. Thin and quiet. The sharpener falls off the table. He looks at me. I ask him if he is ok. The lid of the sharpener has broken off and the shavings fell on the floor. He brings the pieces back on the table, and brings the pencil too. He says he will get the shavings too. May's loud voice distracts him as he does. He looks at her. He comes back. He takes the pencil. The pencil tip broke off. He shows it to me. He looks for it on the floor and finds it. He holds it tight with the tips of his little fingers. He tries to draw with it. He leaves it at the table. I begin to be aware of myself being impatient. Not being present*

What falls off and what breaks off? What does it break off?

Seduced by his gaze, I follow Edward to the drawing table. When he looks to my right, my shoulders, over my shoulders, not me but almost me, I feel that he acknowledges the space around me, he acknowledges that there is a space around me, a context, an otherness. He then stops and looks at me in the eyes before he starts sharpening his pencil. Does he locate and acknowledge me before he begins to play?

There is a continuity that is confirmed by the continuity of my eyes on him which breaks when I see Eilidh from the glass door or when May's voice echoes in the space. They become a third other that breaks a prior twoness that is sustained by means of gaze. Is the sharpener that falls off the table and the lid that breaks off the sharpener and the tip that breaks off the pencil symbolic of my gaze that falls off him or me breaking off him, him breaking off me, us two breaking off a prior oneness?

*He takes a rectangle glossy paper with some patterns on one side, he tells me he will use this one. He turns it over to the blank side and sits back down. He begins to draw. He makes a man but it is faint. I cannot see it well. He says that it doesn't show on this paper. He folds it. Then he unfolds it and he turns it into a cylinder. He looks at me through it. 'I see you', he says. I become aware of how he becomes aware of my seeing him. I feel a space in between us that allows him to become aware of my eyes on him. I am not attuned to him. I have been feeling growingly impatient and unsure of my staying with him today. I am looking at him but I am not with him. I have not been in touch with this internal space that is attuned to his internal space. I am looking at him, not with him*

In this brief moment, Edward plays out beautifully another aspect of being seen and gives it space to rest: the reciprocity in seeing.

What I observe, observes me. What I see, sees me back. If being seen confirms my otherness and verifies my existence, so it does for the one who sees me. When I see Edward, Edward confirms my gaze; my otherness, my being. I give Edward space and he gives me back an identity. He gives me, his observer, my identity. Without him, I do not exist as a see-er or as an observer. I need him in order to validate my presence, my purpose, my experience and give meaning to it. Being seen includes both being held and being persecuted by one's gaze. When Edward grapples with being present in front of my eyes, what does he do to me; to my experience of seeing him? Does it disrupt some kind of sequence or generation? Does it bring me confronted with my own ontological anxiety, as an observer, an adult and a child who grapples with meaning, longs to be seen and fears being seen.

Edward shows me something more: he tells me how what I see is who I am. I look at Edward's drawing to trace him but his man is faint and I cannot see him well, thus cannot trace him. Edward turns his man, himself, into a telescope and looks at me through it and he tells me: I see you - that is, you are - in what you see.

*'Do you see that?', he asks me as he looks at me through his telescope. I lean and I see that he has put the pencil tip inside. He moves and the pencil tip falls on the table. He looks at me. He looks at me, now, after something has happened and I feel broken off him. Like the tip of the pencil. Like when he names what he is about to do. I feel I become separate from his experience of things, of his experience of happenings*

When the pencil tip breaks off, a oneness and a prior sense of going on being is discontinued. This oneness has been sustained by being seen so that when it breaks off the gaze is experienced differently. More detached and fragmented, and less embodied and flowing. I begin to feel that, like my gaze, things happen to Edward.

Perhaps the pencil tip is reminiscent of a separateness that is necessary in order to see the other as an other (is the realisation of separateness experienced as violent and sharp as the breaking of a pencil tip?). Such separateness needs to be, perhaps cannot but be, present each time I see another. Edward places the tip of the pencil inside the telescope and each time he sees me, he also sees our separateness.

*'Look it has been chopped off'. Or did he say topped off? 'Where shall I put it?'*  
*He looks around. 'Where shall I put it? I will put it here', he leaves it on the table.*  
*He takes it again. 'No, I will put it here', slightly further on the paper at the table.*  
*He takes it again. 'Where shall I put it?' He looks at me. 'Where can you put it, lets think'. I look at the table with him. 'Shall I put it in the pencils case?' He keeps his hand inside the case and looks at me. I feel a fear that it will be lost. He takes his hand out. 'I don't know where to put it'. I suddenly become aware of him. I feel he is asking me about himself. His body, his individuality, his way of being? 'Where shall I put it?' He leaves it on the wooden surface next to the case. His movement is simple, plain. I feel emotional. He leaves it there. It is a small space. I cannot see it. It is hidden behind the case. He takes it again and leaves it on the table. Or not? Did he take it from the case or did he leave it there? Do I see it again?*

*He makes a sudden move towards me and stands in front of me and takes my hand. He smiles. He touches my hands and then he takes his hands to his cheeks and smiles warmly looking at me. 'My hands are frozen', he says. I ask him if he wants to put his jacket on. He says that he is not going outside. 'Ok'.*

Watching Edward holding the tip of the pencil tight between his fingers looking around for a place to put it, I imagined him holding himself. Where can I put it, he asks; where can I rest? I imagine him holding me. Where do I go when I am broken off from where I came from? Where does one belong once one is born? Thrown into this world, following birth, what is



one's own place? Edward acknowledges the irreversible aloneness: he asks if he can put the pencil into the pencil case where the other pencils are, but ends up leaving it beside the pencil case.

I isolate Edward's words and hear them again in the light of being. Where can I put it? Where can I put myself? I wonder if Edward grapples with his place in the world in the light of his way of being, of his being present in it? Is there a space for he who grapples with being present and with making a sense of their presence? Existential thinking is interested in being-in-the-world, alone, free, naked of purpose, and in meaning. Responsibility seems to be at the centre of this process of meaning making; responsibility towards both one's own limitations as well as one's own will to choose. Can Edward's experience of life, in its breadth and width, be thought with existentialism? Can Edward be helped by it? Can his own thrownness into life and into death, into freedom and aloneness and despair be supported and contained by existential thinking? If existentialism is reduced to an eclectic and sophisticated way of thinking that rests upon a breadth of experience and the capacity to reflect on its meaning, how does it remain attuned to the persons' lives as they live it in their individual context and in their everydayness? Does it bring about a distancing, a distance from life and from people as they constantly grapple with it and with making meaning of it, that is, from what it is made.

I have thought about the chopped off pencil tip as a symbolic representation of a discontinuation of a going on being that is sustained in a gaze or in the womb. A pencil tip, however, is also an object that is sharp, sharpened by Edward before it was broken off, charged, excited. In what follows I will attempt to think about the chopped off pencil tip with psychoanalytic thinking and specifically through the Freudian theory of castration anxiety.

Castration anxiety is part of the child's psychosexual development most commonly at the age of three to five years old:

The male child becomes motivated, at one stage in his psychosexual development, to possess his mother sexually. However, such a desire cannot be countenanced by the child's father. Indeed, the latter threatens to castrate his son if he should persist in his illicit craving. Presumably, this threat of castration may be made directly and literally, or it may be conveyed indirectly and symbolically. In any case, the threat is perceived by the child and it arouses his intense fear. To reduce the fear, the child must learn to behave in a way which will no longer provoke his father's jealous anger (Sarnoff & Corwin, 1959)

Viewing Edward's play in this light, I wonder if he played out his phantasy of castration, attempting also to fulfil a mastery over its surrounding anxiety. In his play, one could trace the

desire as played out in the sharpening of the pencil and the intense physicality that accompanies it as well as in the choice of words by both Edward and myself that imply castrative associations, words such as fell off, broke off, chopped off and topped off. Observing myself, I feel impatient and find it difficult to stay with Edward. I also feel that things happen *to* him, which makes me think about whether desire can be experienced in such a forceful physical way that it becomes objectified and depersonalised. Later on, Edward is looking for a place for his pencil tip; perhaps a place where his suppressed desire can remain latent allowing him to go on being?

Davies (2012) reviews the work of Freud and Klein on separation; he reads Freud's reworking of his theory of castration anxiety as a reformulation of its limits encompassing of separation anxiety:

(Freud) shows the crucial connection between separation anxiety and castration anxiety, when he describes the latter as the fear of being separated from a highly valued object. The two precursors of castration anxiety, birth itself and weaning, are related to separation from the mother. Castration anxiety during the phallic phase is also related to separation: separation from the genital organ (Davies, 2012:1104)

In object relations, anxiety derives from the life and death instincts rather than from sexual instincts and their repression:

Anxiety about annihilation, the terror of the dependence on objects and the danger of their loss are the central issues: separation anxiety is the key. Klein argued that the fear of annihilation of life is the cause of all anxieties (ibid)

Although Freud acknowledged separation in his theory of sexuality, he did not equate it with the death instinct because for him anxiety about death goes back to anxiety about castration (Davies, 2012:1105):

In contrast Freud supposed that the fear of death does not exist in the unconscious, for the psyche has no capacity for understanding that which it has never experienced: 'the Unconscious seems to contain nothing that could give any content to our conception of the annihilation of life. Castration can be pictured on the basis of the daily experience of the faeces being separated from the body or on the basis of losing the mother's breast at weaning. But nothing resembling death can ever have been experienced ...I am therefore inclined to adhere to the view that the fear of death should be regarded as analogous to the fear of castration'

Laing (1965) takes a different stance and begins his reflection with the idea of being in the world and of relatedness as inherent in being. For Laing (1965) libidinal phantasies do not precede one's self-being; one's own way of being present is not set to defend against one's sexual instincts. In discussing one of his patients, Laing suggests instead that her libidinal phantasies were her defence against the dread of being alone: if her existential position was different, her unconscious phantasies would also be different:

Sexual life and phantasies were efforts, not primarily to gain gratification, but to seek first ontological security (Laing, 1965:57)

A more modern reading of castration anxiety in psychoanalytic thinking (Horne, 2001) focuses on the realisation by the child of the sexual relationship between the parents and the arrival of the third other in the two-person relationship, as well as on the emerging realisation of the boundaries between the adult and the child:

In some cases this realisation is experienced as a castration or narcissistic blow (Hamilton, 1993:273)

Viewed this way, does Edward play out his reworking of such realisation, of his experience of separateness in being a third other, an other from the couple and from the mother. Does he do so in the light of his encounter with me as an observer, a third other who observes things as they happen or a mother-object that he seduces and is simultaneously seduced by before he is called to separate from? Does he try, through his play with myself as an adult, to make sense of his differentness as he begins to understand himself as a child in relation to the adults in his life?

#### **5.3.4 Observation 12: A buried bell**

*I turn to see where she is going and I find Edward on my left; he looks at me holding out a pick-up stick with a white plastic bottle lid on its edge. Was he there all along? 'Hello', I tell him. He holds the stick out to me staring at the lid. 'What is it?', I ask him. He whispers something unwillingly. I take the lid. 'I am making trails', he says. He turns away and begins to make trails on the sand with the*

*pick-up stick. I follow him. He leaves the stick down on the sand and picks up a small twig. He shakes it and then he stops. 'It is a bell'. He walks to the stairs. He puts it between the rails and begins to make a ringing sound. He squeezes his face, his eyes get thinner and I see his teeth. His whole body trembles. 'That is why it is a bell', I say. He stops and walks back where I first saw him, by the slide, and kneels down. 'I will bury it'. He places it on the sand and presses it against it so that it leaves an imprint. He takes it off and then places it into it. He begins to cover it with sand hurriedly. He makes a cross on it, he stands on his knee and steps over it with his shoe. He stands up and jumps forcefully on it once more. He goes behind the slide. I follow him. I find him looking at me, as if waiting for me. He looks down at the twigs in the sand tray, I think he touches some but readily leaves them and goes back to his own buried twig. He kneels down: 'where is my bell?'. He digs the sand with his little hand but it doesn't appear. I am afraid that we will never find it in all this sand. 'There it is'. He picks it up. 'I need to wash it'. 'Ok'. He holds it from its edge and begins to shake it. 'I need to wash it', he says again as if I did not listen to him 'ok', I tell him. 'I need to wash it', he says again urgently. He leaves it down and begins to brush away the sand from his trousers. He shakes his whole body and makes circles around himself*

Being buried is another image used by Laing (1965) to describe engulfment. As with being eaten up or being drowned, the threat here is the engulfment of identity and one's annihilation. As with the paper circle around his neck, does Edward transcend a twig into an object through which he can symbolise, play out and manage a phantasy of engulfment? In it he gives himself some life savers. He gives me his lid to hold on to, he makes trails on the sand as he walks, and he chooses to bury a twig that is not a twig but a bell that can be heard even if out of sight. Then he makes a cross over it. When he tries to look for it, he finds it. Later on, when it is time for me to leave, he marks his need and his capacity to survive and be found:

*'Where can we put these?' I show him the lid and the plate with the stones in my hands. He looks at them. 'We can put them somewhere safe'. 'Yes'. He makes a wide hole in the sand where we are and takes the plate with the stones and puts them in. Then he covers them with sand. He puts another small stone on the little hill and covers it with more sand ... Edward makes another cross on the hill. 'What is it?' 'It is so that you can remember where it is'*

Another way of thinking about his lifesavers is as sensory hints. By being held (as an object lid or by being remembered in mind) and by being visible they counteract the out-of-sightedness in being engulfed. Does Edward play out being in out of sight? What happens when I am seen? Where am I when I am not seen? Where are you when I am not seen? Edward seems to be interested in his sense of himself in relation to others, in testing his self-consciousness against another gaze, perhaps to negotiate the degree of his dependency on others. As Laing (1965:108) puts it:

Being aware of himself and knowing that other people are aware of him are a means of assuring himself that he exists, also that they exist

On the other hand, making oneself invisible or a twig disappear by burying it can also be thought as a defence against exposure. Apart from a sense of existence, being seen might also expose one to a sense of danger, especially when the world is experienced as a potentially dangerous place (Laing, 1965). Yet, in the context of our encounters, I feel that Edward is more interested in testing the interchangeability of presentness, absentness and the spaces in between rather than hiding away from these or one of these. He did so when he played hide and seek with me under the table, when he buried his bell and in the moment that follows from a later observation.

### 5.3.5 Observation 16: O o o

*Edward comes over. He sits opposite me at the steps of the wooden house. He looks at me. I see him. He smiles with that tight smile of his. I wonder what he thinks of me today that I was present but not with him. May goes to the snack table. Eilidh asks Emily to read the story again and Emily begins. Edward goes back to the couch before he moves to the small space under the stairs of the wooden house. I don't see him. I hear 'O o o', as if he is testing the sound of 'o'. Testing his presence? Am I heard? Am I heard if not seen? Am I present? The people in the room don't hear his voice, they don't seem to hear his voice, they don't look to find where this voice is coming from. I hear it but he cannot know.*

Edward's 'O o o' connects the space of presentness with that of absentness and tests the possibility of a continuity: that is the possibility of being heard when out of sight, or else of being present even when absent to the eyes. Do I still exist if I am out of sight? Edward negotiates his existence by means of his voice. Like a second skin, his voice sustains him in the moment of absentness. It becomes a mediator, a transitional space between being seen and disappearing. It ensures his continuity even when out of sight. The repetitive 'o' and the pause in between allows for a continuity in time. The space in between presentness and absentness allows both to breathe and Edward the chance to survive them.

Laing (1965) describes the lack of ontological autonomy as the need to evoke one's presence in their absence; this is crucial for their going on being. He discusses the experience of oneself as a person under the loving eyes of the mother as necessary for the development of the self. Internalized, they then allow the child some ontological security in moments when the mother is physically absent. Edward's voice can be thought of as a way to sustain continuity in being even when not being seen by another.

Edward returns to his interest in presentness and absentness in various times during our time together. Laing (1965) recalls Freud pointing to repetitive play as an attempt to master again and again the anxiety that a danger evokes. I think that Edward has found inventive ways to do this and that he was from an early stage very attuned to the presentness of the observing eyes and capable of playing with the space that they carry. I felt, early on, that this space was somehow familiar to Edward, as was to me Edward's inviting gaze.

### **5.3.6 Observation 20: Hello, goodbye**

*Edward is here in the main room. I leave my stuff in the box room. He looks at me with a familiar faint smile on the edge of his lip. Thoughtful smile. He acknowledges my coming. His eyes stay with me and follow me as I come in, and as I go. I walk to the art room and I see him standing and watching me silent; he brings his hand on his face, he shakes his hand, like waving hello or goodbye, he touches his cheek; he faintly touches his cheek as he waves his hand as if stroking his cheek; his eyes flutter at each touch as if they cannot afford it. I walk past him but I look at him, I find it difficult to let him outside my gaze, how can I move in this movement, in this rapid coming and going of his hand he takes me in, I don't fall. Where does coming end and where does going begin in rapidness? There is no boundary, this spasmodic movement keeps the hand from falling, it keeps it*

*from collapsing, it becomes a staying, it comes and goes, but as it does it doesn't come and it doesn't go, it stays, it stays moving. This rapid coming and going and coming of his hand, his rapid coming and going and coming of mine every Friday.*

There is a specific quality in Edward's movement of the hand that feels like a shaking. His movement is fast and repetitive and trembling. It is not a peaceful movement, not at peace, not at home. What do I do when I shake? I move, I do not come and I do not go, I move, I do not stay, I do not stay still, I am not a part, I stand apart, I move, but I move quickly, so quickly that the movement looks still, fixed, it becomes a position, a staying. I can only stay by moving, if I move constantly I cannot leave, there is no space to leave, the only way I can stay is by moving, by shaking. This ongoing movement shakes away the present, the moment, the nowness, something of the very being in the moment, or perhaps it does not. Perhaps it is self-conscious, hyper-conscious, very attuned to each new now, attentive to transience, representative of the coming and going, of being seen and not being seen, of presentness and absentness.

What does Edward shake off?

In its fastness, shaking becomes almost still, a wall that keeps something at bay and protects from a danger. In its fast repetition, it becomes a layer, a cloth that wraps and holds together, a kind of a second skin. Bick (1968) refers to the second skin as that smell, light, noise or sensual object that is invested in such a way that it comes to be experienced as an actual skin. There is, however, something about the quality, the degree, and the texture of Edward's movement that feels so sensual and physical that it comes across to me as a (longing for a) second skin:

The need for a containing object would seem, in the infantile unintegrated state, to produce a frantic search for an object—a light, a voice, a smell, or other sensual object—which can hold the attention and thereby be experienced, momentarily at least, as holding the parts of the personality together ... through the development of a "second-skin" formation dependence on the object is replaced by a pseudo-independence...for the purpose of creating a substitute for this skin container function (Bick, 1968:484)

In its repetition, shaking states something and does so by doing it; it does again and again and again, it does not stay still, it moves, it is alive, it confirms its aliveness, its existence. As a movement, repetition shakes away non-existence, nothingness, the threat of annihilation by means of its over-activity. The fast repetition confirms a going on being. Such going on being

does not go for long and does not stay for long. In between staying and going it stays present, it is being.

The quality of Edward's shaking of his hands has been familiar in my time with him. I have met it before in different embodiments. I find it in his repetition of words, *'anything, anything, anything'*, *'loud, loud, I said it loud'*, *in the urgency of the 'I need to wash it'*, in the unreal purple glowing, almost magical moment when Edward moved his pencil fast and softly. These times felt fragile, as if they themselves were trembling, yet sharp and essential, but ungrounded, almost unreal. Where is the futility and where is the despair? Does Edward negotiate something that can be borne only for so long and so much, something so sharp that needs to be turned magically to something unreal?

### 5.3.7 Discussion

Laing offers a comprehensive and descriptive account of the lives of ontological insecurity and leaves me wondering about its source; relational in its nature, is it attached to our early relationships with our significant others or is it inherent in being, in our being in the world as we are thrown into the world? Are the boundaries between these two identifiable? Are they real? As part of the human nature, ontological insecurity moves in a spectrum of diversity and degree and wears various clothes. We, individuals, relate to it in different ways. Laing (1965) speaks of these not only as defences against it but also as ways of living with it and as attempts to transcend it.

Edward's play stays in my mind as distinctive in its character: it is creative and self-conscious, relational and more alone. The capacity to be both, one with and more separate, and to move between the two is in itself an internal space of creativeness. It is, however, the qualities of these states that are characteristic in Edward's play and reveal a strong interplay, an emphasized movement between them: his moves, the sharpness, the fastness of his movement, his presentness, the presentness of his absence while present. I think that in his play Edward is interested in his self in a very explicit, almost investigative, manner. During some of those times of reflection, I felt far from him: I observed Edward as he tried to think something about his being, his being present in relation to me. On some occasions, he played out these negotiations symbolically, in others more literally. These latter occasions felt most powerful: when I observed him observing himself. I felt Edward very present in being separate and perhaps the distinctive character of his play lies there: in the way (and the capacity) in which



he uses me, thus relates to me, to communicate his separateness from me as well as my separateness from him.

Often when seeing him, and more often, in reading over my observations of him, I felt that I witnessed performances. Moments resembled scenes from a play, which is directed by an adult, played by adults, grappling with adult matters, serious matters, heavy matters, matters about life, about meaning, about absurdity; existential matters? Edward is the protagonist; he is the only actor on the scene. His play feels like a performance; perhaps a monologue without words. His play, his way, his way of being is theatrical. His performing is imbued with a powerful physicality and an unsettling absurdity yet also with gentleness. Did this really happen? I feel uneasy. How does Edward feel? How does he experience this moment? How does he experience the world? Am I in touch with something of his experience or is Edward conveying something about transience, and present-ness, arbitrariness and fragmentation?

I have thought with Laing about Edward's interest in presentness and absentness, separateness and relatedness, his concern about being seen and being out of sight as it came across through his play with me and my response to it in our observations. In thinking about what Edward is trying to understand, with what he is grappling, I wonder whether the very object of his play is his (sense of) self.

My thinking of Edward in the light of ontological insecurity ran along or possibly under the shadow of his seductive gaze. Although I discuss a moment of Edward's play in terms of castration anxiety, this is only a small part. In this writing, Edward's play is primarily thought of with Laing's ontological insecurity. Taking on a maternal role, did I respond to the staff's suggestion to come in on Fridays when Edward is also in by coupling up with Laing and approaching Edward's play in a more theoretical, omnipotent, less associative manner than I did with May and Nadia? Did I need the solid certainty of a theory to give a form to, or perhaps defend against, the elusive existential quality of Edward's play? Did I retreat to theoretical security, claimed some of its confidence to defend against ontological insecurity? Or have I relied on Laing to resist Edward's seduction? Is his theory theoretical enough, male and patriarchal enough, to theorise away seduction? Is it authoritative enough to survive Edward's tempers and desires? In my (almost exclusive) use of Laing's theory, do I couple up with a Scottish father and do we, in our interpretative language, impose a boundary to our child's desires? Is our language concrete enough to contain the alive mess of the ontological insecurity? In need of neatness and separateness do I need a box for, a distance from, Edward's transference? In need of smallness, do I need to stay above and in control of his phantasy of seduction?

In one of our last observations, I saw Edward wearing a jumper that bore the initial of his first name. I felt relieved. His initial is at the centre of his top, big and looking to be, or I wish it to be, hand-knitted. Edward stands looking at a small rabbit in the hands of Rob and Amanda. His gaze is quiet and a little melancholic. I feel quiet and melancholic. Quiet and relieved. In the face of this letter something has come together. In being named, Edward is restored in me not only as an other but also as a child. During our observations, there was something adult in his gaze and in his manner; adult enough to seduce me to follow him. His initial restores him also as a child of his mother. I imagined his mother sewing his initial on his jumper, talking to him as she gives it to him and him listening. That is, a mother who names him and mothers him as an other. I felt relieved in the face of his initial or else the face of his mother who appeared so close to our end. I felt relieved also because by wearing it I imagined Edward asking me to let him back to his mother, his childhood and to his own name.

## 5.4 Baba

What colour is death? Baba's hair is honey, that shade between blonde and brown which is warm and sweet, it is curly and fresh and voluminous, rich, the edges of her curls are light, lighter in their weight and in their shade than the ones that are deeper, closer to her scalp, and they fall lightly around her head. They do not fall, they fly, they fly up above her and dance around her. The colour of her skin is honey too, suntanned, it is the colour of a long morning play under the sun, running and shouting under the sun, red cheeks, tired arms, the hands fall heavily, the fingers are slightly swollen and hard at the edges. Her colour is not the colour of the morning sun; it is less bright, less clear, it is more nuanced, something that is 'in between', it could be the colour of dawn or sunset. There is a moment in sunrise that can be mistaken for sunset: Baba's colour is a little more tired than dawn, because dawn is clean of life, the sunset carries back down the lives of the day. I think that Baba's skin colour is sunset; the sunset after a hard working day.

She is five and a half years old when I meet her in March. She looks to be and is the oldest of the children at the nursery. In one of my first observations, a member of staff tells me that Baba started going to primary school at the beginning of the year and shortly after came back, deciding to have one more year at nursery. She has smiley eyes and a readily enthusiastic gaze. She has a strong loud voice and a strong loud laugh. When she observes or listens, her gaze is attentive and silent and its silence is loud too.

As a word, 'Baba' has a loudness. Its loudness is not sharp, it is earthy and hollow and bumpy. I think it is the letter B, it echoes and its echo is bouncy and serious and introverted. It brings to mind the naked steps of black women as they dance in a circle to the repetitive rhythm of a drumming of a ritual. Baba is not a black girl but I have imagined her as one of these women. I have seen her running in colourful skirts, long and loose, working in the garden with a huge hat on, at the art table wearing a heavy necklace with colourful beads - her mum's? -, all big, larger than her both in their size and their history. Her clothes carry history, other lives, times and places; perhaps this is why they sometimes felt decorative to me. What showed through was some kind of naturalness, almost a primitiveness, something lively and exotic, a strength and an interest in life as it breathes and as it grows.

I am not sure how I use the word life here, how I define it or what I mean with it, and how I can approach it, take it down and describe it. I think that when I think of Baba I have this image of a girl who does, who stands and looks steadily ahead while her doing, her standing and her looking have a readiness; she throws herself at where she is and at what happens

around her. Her leaving and returning to the nursery was something that I did not think about *per se* during our time together; it did not come to mind often and, as a reality or a fact, it felt foreign to the place she was when I met her.

Now, as I look back at our time together, I first see Baba hammering a nail on a piece of wood at the tools table in one of our last observations. Her hammering has a working quality. She focuses and works hard and long on it. I do not think of it as play but as work. This last memory of Baba's preoccupation with hammering has stayed with me, perhaps even more than her sunny face. Still, it never occurred to me that Baba would stay with me as she does now: with death.

Writing this now still feels shocking and alien. Almost unreal. Perhaps it is not death what I am trying to describe but something else, for which I do not have a name. Perhaps this relationship with death that I am trying to understand is not Baba's. Perhaps it is my death, or my dad's, who falls ill now as I begin to think and to write about Baba.

I feel confused; I feel a distance from what is, somehow, the closest I get to Baba when I read over my writings about her. This distance has found its way into my writing, the act of my writing, and my thinking, my capacity to think. I have been finding it difficult to find a way to start writing and a way to think about death in my writing or to understand what it is I am writing about.

27 March 2015:

I need to write this, but I can't. I must go on. It is death's turn yet I must go on and meet it. Write it out. It does not come out. I read, the more I read the more it drifts away. I write a little and words soak up the life in me.

I forget easily. Something make sense for a fleeting moment and then escapes me. My language plays tricks on me too. I write greek. English but as greek language would write it. My tongues are confused under the shadow of the improbable, the ungraspable. My mothers are not enough. I begin to speak without saying anything. It is all about speaking, keep speaking. Keep going.

I write this in the space of a new e-mail. Compose. This way I feel that I make something of it. That I create a movement. And that there is a respondent at the other end of death. That there is an other end. An other. An end, not a void.

I think I need more time, more time with this so as to make sense of it. Death, don't die yet. Give me some more time and I will come to you.

All I have is the image of this girl, with curly suntanned hair, honey skin, a loud voice and a smile - always a smile. It was a real smile.

And then death. She names death and she plays it out. But is this her? Is this me, my own envy of life? This knot that lingers and this forgetfulness that haunts me now, is it mine? Or hers?

How can I write about death? Is it death or death instinct? I know nothing of it. I don't know its words or its language.

I stumble upon something that doesn't let me into it, or anywhere close to it.

I was supposed to write about Eilidh now. Why do I write about death? And is it death that I am talking about? I don't think so.<sup>18</sup>

What is it about my time with Baba that brings me here, thinking about death? Tracing our time together there were times when Baba wondered about death namely and played it out by means of symbols and objects: numbers and flowers. And there is this time, near the end of our observations, when I feel that she negotiates something about growth and loss and time; during this time I meet her at the tools table hammering and nailing. What are my associations with death during these moments? Can these help me understand why it has stayed with me as such and why I have anchored to it?

I will try to address my confusion by attending each of these instances and beginning to unpack the qualities, the languages and the associations around death or loss in them. I encompass the associations and the memories that I have when I attend to these moments and welcome them as spaces that dialogue with the space of observing and, now, of writing. In my thinking of Baba's play I move between these spaces/times: the space of observation, the space of writing, the space of memory and association. I think of memories, feelings or associations that emerge in me while being with Baba in the observations and in my writing to convey how Baba's play moves me and what in me it moves. In turn, I look in them to find Baba. Do they embody some qualities of Baba's experience in and of that moment? Do they carry parts of it? Does Baba's play carry parts of me? Do we carry each other?

Rather than thinking of this writing as a writing about something, I think of it, rather, I use it, to find what this something is. Unlike my writing about the other children, here I do not pair up with one sole other, person, author, theorist or idea with which to think. Instead, I take with me more than one person to help me explore these moments; Baba, my self and what we evoke in each other. Perhaps it feels to me safer that way as it makes death feel more alive and crowded.

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<sup>18</sup> Extract from personal notes following my writing about Edward, or before writing about Baba.

I look at death as it emerges over the course of four observations in the form of growth, loss, aggression, separation, uncertainty. It is embodied in specific acts or objects of play, qualities, textures and scents in the context of Baba's play as well as in my associations in the face of it. Instead of in isolated moments, I present Baba's play within its wider observation context. This choice grows from the acknowledgment of this writing as a process of inquiry. At the moment when Baba voices the word 'die', I do not know how it is meant. I look to unearth her 'die' and to break it open to its meanings in relation to its context and in relation to me as inescapably present in registering it. I follow her play as it growingly narrows down to the word 'die' and then as it begins to depart from it. In doing so, I follow how that moment was prepared: how Baba arrived at it, how I arrived at it, what happened prior to it, who left, who joined, what followed it. This allows me to think of Baba's play with death within a relational context, interior and exterior, rather than isolated and self-assured. It allows me to move between these two spaces and to think of how they make each other. It also allows me to think of Baba's play in relation to me; what I have registered in my observation and the story I have constructed in the light of my knowledge of Baba's age and her earlier experience of leaving and returning to the nursery.

This movement in the construction of meaning is consistent with one of the objectives of my research: to open up space and to invite more interpretations and more readings; meanings that might as well lie in the outskirts of Baba's play, hidden, played out or embodied in its context as I have registered it.

#### **5.4.1 'Numbers go on forever'**

*Baba and Lisa are in the art room by the art table which is full of boxes. Norah, one of their nursery teachers, is also there tidying up some more boxes in the cupboards. I sit with them. The boxes are empty and used; I recognise some. There is still some life in them; and some sadness. The girls are making a shop. They try to sort them out and choose the ones they will use. There is a messiness that leaves me scattered yet fits with my own uncertainty. I find it difficult to focus on the sequence of the girls' play. I find myself looking over the main room to see if Eilidh found her doll; should I have waited for her? Baba finds the box of a perfume. She looks at me enchanted and curious. She puts some on but it is empty. She doesn't acknowledge it. She asks me if I want to smell it and she brings the perfume close to my nose. It is empty but I can still smell its past aroma. I think*

*of the teachers at the nursery. I wonder if it belonged to one of them. I look at Norah behind the girls down into her own world of boxes. Baba asks Lisa and gets the permission to spray into the two holes of an egg box she plays with. They hear some children singing in the main room and wonder what song it is. They sing along quietly for a bit. I see Eilidh there. She holds her doll and moves about. I find myself hoping she sees where I am so that she knows I am still there. Norah comes and goes. Lisa asks me to make a paper airplane for her. I encourage her to try herself. She asks me again. I encourage her again and tell her how I am there to watch them as they play. Baba asks me if I know how to do a paper plane. I think about it but don't reply, and soon Baba changes the conversation.*

*She speaks loudly and I find it difficult to stay with it. I wonder how my change of focus on children or on the space affects my observation. 'Numbers go on forever', I suddenly hear Baba saying in a clear voice. Norah: 'Yes, that's right, numbers do go on forever'. I feel drawn in. Lisa says 'No, numbers don't go on forever, numbers stop going on forever when you die'. Baba: 'No, numbers go on forever even after you die. Don't they?' She looks at me. Lisa says again 'numbers stop going on forever when you die'. I look at Lisa and her granddad comes to my mind. My granddad comes to my mind. Baba: 'No, numbers go on forever after you die, don't they?' She asks me and waits. I say 'I don't know; what do you think?' Baba: 'I think that numbers go on forever, dada said it'. She goes back to her work. We all go back to our work (Observation 3)*

I remember how the word 'die' drew me readily in that moment, how, in its sound, my scattered self gathered around it. In search of existential concerns in my early observations perhaps I felt relieved because my own concern was relieved. My question was confirmed and my going there found a meaning. My other concern, death, was shared, let alone named. Could these be one of my anchors to Baba and death?

Now I try to find a way to write about this moment that is faithful to this first enthusiasm but I cannot because the word that drew me in is no longer enough. It feels empty of meaning and looking *at* it alone feels futile as if the word is there to resist a meaning. Baba speak about death, but about what kind of death does she speak? For Jung (1954:10-11) 'die', like 'kill', in the language of children means to 'get rid of', passively or actively, and is used to denote some form of destruction or removal. Meaning, an existential or a relational quality in Baba's use of the word 'die', cannot be found *at* the word or *on* it. Rather, meaning, that is, a quality

or an association or a story, rests next to the word, around it or before it, in its context or in that place between Baba and myself.

Restricted to its paragraph, to what seems to be its immediate context, this discussion about death feels cold. There is my memory of my granddad and my phantasy of Lisa's granddad but there is no emotion on behalf of Baba or her friend or myself. The closest to an emotion I get is that quality of coldness as I read over this passage; coldness as an absence of emotion. A phenomenological reading of this writing might stay with the absences that reveal more than the presences, that is, with how meaning might be embodied in that collective absence of emotion. Observing this text as I have written it, as I have heard it, I trace a quality of death in the emotionally deprived language in which it is written. Staying with the crafting of this moment, I observe the absence of adjectives, of nouns, that is, of objects, the absence of light or of some shade, the overloading of verbs - active, overactive, alive - the brevity of the statements, the boundedness, the firmness, the persisting 'no' at the beginning of each sentence, that insists, defends, protects, excludes death from coming in. These might take me closer to how some aspects of forever and death live out in me, in that moment, through Baba and her language and perhaps to how they live out in Baba, in that moment, in my eyes and through my language than the content *per se*. This phenomenological attention to the making of the narrative and to my feelings - I am surprised that even though I am drawn to this moment I feel no emotions in it - brings me to think about how feeling might be split and kept outside of the wording of death as the moment unfolds, but can be found projected and embodied in my feeling (or its absence in this case) which is traced in my writing. In other words, to unpack what the content of the narrative does to the narrative.

Opening up this moment to locate it within a wider context - its space - brings in more narratives to connect with and to explore it into.

When I walk to the art table, I find myself in a space full of empty boxes which Norah, one of the nursery teachers, is sorting. Unlike numbers that go on in series, this space is messy with boxes and my mind is scattered in different spaces: it is with the sadness, inside the empty boxes and with Eilildh wondering where she might be. As if Baba feels this, she offers me her perfume to smell and brings me back to where she is. In the presence of the empty perfume bottles and their enduring odour, my mind begins to wander. I imagine these as boxes of the teacher's old perfumes that she brought into the nursery for art activities. Baba brings a bottle close to her in search of a reminiscent smell. I imagine it still filled with some life; I see it in the teacher's house, her bedroom, on a drawer chest under the mirror. As I write my observation later that day, a past memory comes in: my mother comes to my bed and kisses me before she goes to work, I am ill and I stay home, her hands smell of her perfume and when



she goes her odour lingers, it remains on my face and stays even after she leaves. Bachelard (1971:136) speaks of odours as the 'first evidence of our fusion with the world...the centre of intimacy'. Phillips (1998:75) says to his analysand during a session:

your mother's perfume was her smell that you had to share with other people.  
When she wore perfume she was hinting: about some exciting life of hers away  
from you

For Klein, the life and death drives attach themselves to objects. Libido and aggression are emotions of love and hate directed to others; are they, thus, relationships? Freud spoke of life and death instincts as quantities of energy, internal forces expressed as libido and destructiveness that are driven towards creation and breaking apart, connecting and disconnecting (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983);

Something inevitably happens to us when we are born, Freud says, which shapes our lives: we desire...And yet, Freud asserts in 1920, above all, or rather beneath it all, we desire to die (Phillips, 1999:79)

My feeling in this moment is that at the other end of a life drive quality, that is, of the perfume and the odour that remains even if the bottle is empty or the mother has gone, is not a desire to die but a holding on to life and a fear of dying or else of annihilation. Klein discusses how anxiety that arises internally from the function of the death instinct manifests itself as a fear of annihilation (Rosenfeld, 1988). I go back to the passage in search of a destructive or aggressive trace but what I come upon is a desire for a going on being.

In his writing, Unamuno (1954, ch.3) discusses the longing to not die or else the hunger for immortality:

It is impossible for us, in effect, to conceive of ourselves as not existing, and no effort is capable of enabling consciousness to realize absolute unconsciousness, its own annihilation.

We aim at being all because in that we see the only means of escaping from being nothing. We wish to save our memory—at any rate, our memory. How long will it last?

My memory, my name, a number, all containers of something else, airy, transparent, ungraspable, unable to be conceived, my memory, my name, my age, a number, does it go on forever, does it go on after I die?

For Unamuno (1954, ch.3) the anxiety to perpetuate our name, to survive ourselves in the memory of another is more pressing than the risk to believe in vain:

Faced with this risk, I am presented with arguments designed to eliminate it, arguments demonstrating the absurdity of the belief in the immortality of the soul; but these arguments fail to make any impression upon me, for they are reasons and nothing more than reasons, and it is not with reasons that the heart is appeased. I do not want to die—no; I neither want to die nor do I want to want to die; I want to live for ever and ever and ever. I want this "I" to live—this poor "I" that I am and that I feel myself to be here and now, and therefore the problem of the duration of my soul, of my own soul, tortures me

In the light of the need to survive myself in the memory of another, what happens to me when the other leaves? What happens to me when the mother leaves? What happens to the mother when she leaves? Does she die? Does she exist even if I do not see her? Do I exist without her? Do numbers, mother, go on even after I die, that is, even if I do not see them? Perhaps death here speaks of something that relates to loss; loss not only of that which one desires but also of that which gives back a sense of self. In his thinking about the mother-infant relationship, Winnicott speaks about that stage of maternal preoccupation, a time of heightened sensitivity, when the mother adapts to her infant's needs giving back a sense of self by means of a reciprocal relationship. Any interruptions in this reciprocity are experienced by the infant as fear of annihilation and threats in his/her going-on-being. Winnicott also speaks of such interruptions and of the recovery from them as essential for the strengthening of the infant's ego (Winnicott, 2012).

Is Baba concerned with a going on being? There is a sense of emptiness that fills the space: there are the empty boxes that lie sad all over the table; the room that is empty of Eilidh; the empty perfume bottles; the empty cases at the egg box. All these spaces are womblike yet seem to be deprived of life. In fact, Baba tries to instil life in the egg box by spraying some of the perfume in it. To be empty of is also to be emptied. If I empty my mother's womb, does my mother go on being? Perhaps there is here, as Klein has put it, a death instinct in the form of destruction, disconnection and disintegration that could provoke a fear of annihilation. If numbers are empty or emptied of a mind that thinks of them, do they go on being? Does death here denote some kind of separation from another's thinking mind or from one's object and

some concern over their fate, both the self's and the other's, which is crucial to a sense of going on being?

Opening up and locating this moment in an even wider context allows to encompass or else to generate some other stories in relation to it. Going further back, I meet Baba at the art table and think about what happened before she comes to wonder whether numbers go on forever.

*Baba says that she is taller than everyone in the centre, apart from the teachers. She speaks quickly and looks down working on her mask. She says that she is the oldest, apart from the teachers; the only one who is 5 and a half. Lisa says that Eilidh is 7. They laugh and Eilidh says she is not. Lisa replies that Eilidh's mum said that her dress is 7. She is serious. Eilidh tells her that her dress is 7 or 8 but she is not; 'isn't that silly?' Lisa says it is. (Observation 3)*

Perhaps Baba thinks about numbers, her age and her tallness early on that day. While working on her mask, she says that she is the oldest of the children, apart from the teachers. Is this good or bad? I remain ambivalent, because her tone is triumphant yet I sense a sadness, perhaps an aloneness, in her oldness. I am struck by her use of the word 'apart' instead of 'except'. 'Apart' feels somehow uneven, unfit, unsuccessful; it feels separate from the rest of the sentence, from the teachers, from the children. If she is the oldest and she stands apart from the children and from the teachers, who is she? Who is she with?

*Baba puts her new mask on and makes a screaming sound. She asks me about the nose. She says that she knows how to make one but I don't. She puts the mask on again and goes away excited to find something ... She comes in from the art room wearing her mask and a tropical flower necklace on. For a moment I feel intimidated by her look. There is something primitive, prehistoric and wild in her appearance. I get used to it as she walks to the table. She roars like an animal but I can still imagine her laughing sunny face under the mask as she does. She approaches Eilidh, leans forward and roars, Eilidh shakes up and looks at her, smiles and goes back to her crafts. Baba goes away again (Observation 3)*

Could it be that some of Baba's oldness and her tallness, her difference, her aloneness, the feared possibility of not belonging tries to be hidden behind this mask? Does she play out her alienation? Her roar points to something monstrous which - for a moment - is monstrous enough to intimidate me. I wonder if she gives me a sense of how she experiences some aspects of being the oldest and the tallest among her teachers and the children.

Who am I in this story? Neither a child nor a teacher, who am I in the nursery? Who am I with? Where do I belong? I think that Baba picks up on my own difference and gives me a sense of her own experiences of difference. When she tells me that I do not know how to make a mask and later on at the arts table when she asks me if I know how to make a paper plane she exposes me and my separateness from the others, or else my being in there while being different, being present yet not fitting in. In this way, she also tests me: can you survive being here and being different? Can you survive not knowing where you belong? Do you survive my attack? Do you go on being after my attack? Do you go on being after I separate you from others or, indeed, from me? Do I go on being after I separate from this space and leave the nursery?

Perhaps Baba has been concerned with numbers earlier than early on that day. Going back to her question I realise that, although interested in it, Baba does not ask explicitly about death. Her question is if numbers go on forever to which her friend Lisa respond with death. Did her friend name something *for* Baba? Was Baba thinking at all about death? I stay solely with her question and think of it in the light of her earlier play: What happens if the numbers go on forever? Do they make her more monstrous, do they take her more and more away from the nursery, from her womb, do they separate her, do they grow her, do they grow her to die? Like the egg box and the perfume bottle, do they hold her, do numbers name her, age her, thus survive her from annihilation? When numbers go on they do not disintegrate, they do not scatter, they always contain because they name, they do not separate, they keep together. But when one dies, do they still go on, empty of life?

#### 5.4.2 'Who wants to die forever?'

*It is cold outside. Baba goes to Linda, one of the nursery staff, who holds a big broom and sweeps the sand. In front of her, a young boy with a smaller broom paves the way for her. Mark<sup>19</sup> is also here. They are making a speed bump for children to run over. Baba asks to have a go with the broom. She takes it and*

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<sup>19</sup> This is not Nadia's brother but a different boy with the same pseudonym.

*follows the boy. All of them work. I begin to become aware of myself looking at them. I begin to feel uncomfortable and aware of my body: how shall I stand? Where shall I place my hands? Where shall I look? The children? The broom? The sand?*

*The boy places his foot on a small path parallel to the main path. His foot fits in. Linda places her foot further along, her foot fits in too. Baba looks interested - her face lights up - and places her foot in between their spaces. She says that the boy's space is too small for her and Linda's space is too big. 'You need a medium', Linda says looking at Baba, then Baba's foot in the path happy that it found a place.*

*The boy and Linda move further down the path. Baba stays back and sweeps alone. She looks at the speed bump further down the path; it is far. 'It is hard', she says and manages one more sighing sweep. A black surface begins to appear underneath the sand but I only see parts of it – is this stone? Baba leaves the broom and brings over a spade from the sand tray. She begins to carry the sand to the bump. The spade looks so small on the pile of the sand, it looks small in Baba's hands too.*

*...she walks back to the start of the path and begins to dig the wet sand with her spade. Mark comes over. 'What are you doing?', he asks. 'An earthquake'. (Observation 11)*

I meet Baba as she negotiates her place, the space that she inhabits: she tries to fit her foot in the space between a teacher and a younger child, that is, between what is too small and too big. She is told that she needs, is?, a medium. Where does this leave her?

She becomes interested in sweeping the sand and in making speed bumps for the younger children. She spends a long time engaged in it. As I revisit the moment, I find myself wanting to find out more about the texture of the sand, its smell and its temperature, I wonder about the act of sweeping, of digging: what is it for her, what absorbs her in it? I begin to imagine sweeping as flattening, flattening the edges, the sharp edges, the differences, and I think of it also as paving a way. I remember Baba sweeping towards one specific direction: she makes a path for younger children, the ones that will come after her. This path has a bump.

There is something ambiguous about this: the making of a speed bump counteracts the making of a path, limits some of its openness and discourages a going on it. A space is opened and

then it is closed. A speed bump in itself is ambiguous: it protects yet restricts. Could the opening of the path be thought of as the connecting, self-realising, self-discovering quality of a life instinct and the speed bump the destructive, aggressive quality of the death instinct? Could its protective, life-saving function contain some masked envious quality for the life-givingness of the young children? In trying to save them, does Baba try to save some of their youth, their liveliness for her? Or, perhaps, in her? Rosenfeld (1988) discusses envy as one of the manifestations of the death instinct. She speaks of the erotization of the aggressive instinct in a situation of fusion of the life and death instinct. Baba speaks of, imagines, a libidinal earthquake under the bump. Does the bump flatten something aggressive? Does Baba play out some of her ambivalence towards the younger children at the nursery or else some of her internal struggle between some forms of the life and death instinct? Or, does she play out her ambivalence about her own exodus from the nursery; does she test out the way and does she then make speed bumps to delay her going, her growing, to keep the numbers from going on?

At the end of this observation I note the following:

May 2014:

As I sit down to write this observation, I feel resistance. I struggle to settle and to write about it, to write it down. I feel delayed, stuck, especially when writing about the sweeping of the sand. Sweeping away. Staying with sweeping away. Sand. Time.<sup>20</sup>

I go back to this observation two more times; I continue to have a strong response to this moment.

June 2014:

It is nearly a month since this observation and the writing of it. I read it again, and I experience the same stuck-ness. I struggle to move on, to get it read, I get stuck, I stick, I am dragging myself into the words, the sequence of the instances is loose, the instances are not separated, the text is not tight, the meanings are floating.<sup>21</sup>

October 2014:

Now, months later, I read this again, near the end I feel the wet stuckness of the sand, this wet bulk, heavy, difficult to move, something about something that cannot be captured, too dense to be seen. The feeling is a wetness.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Note on the day of the observation following its writing

<sup>21</sup> Note on the observation following the end of the fieldwork

<sup>22</sup> Note on rereading the observation

A feeling of stuckness echoed down through to each of my revisits to this observation. What is this stuckness, stickiness about? I feel weighed down, taken in. What did Baba sweep away? Ageing as a reverse gravity? Her leaving the nursery? Her need to stay or her need to leave?

*'Did you know I am going on holidays tomorrow?' 'Yes', Mark says. 'Guess where I am going'. 'France?' 'No' 'London?' 'No'. She smiles. 'Guess'. She looks at me making round movement with her waist. 'Guess'. Pause. 'I don't know where I am going!', she says loud and excited as if she got us. Her eyes sparkle. 'That's why I am asking you'. 'Have you been there before?' Mark wonders in a whispering voice. I watch them speaking without taking their eyes away from their work, professionals, adults. 'Guess what', Baba's voice is loud, 'my mum and my dad don't know where we are going!', she laughs loudly.*

*...a child cries, Baba stops shovelling. She looks towards the child, I cannot see him from where I am, he must be behind the playhouse. She pauses. She frowns. She holds the shovel between her legs, holds on to it, like a witch with her broom ready to fly. She looks at Dorothy. 'What are you doing?'. Dorothy looks down at the sand that she digs with her shovel, her own earthquake. She looks absorbed, she doesn't listen to Baba, she thinks of the child and waits a little before she goes to him. Baba sees the children at the swings and runs to them (Observation 11)*

Baba's knowing laugh feels almost manic to me; is it knowing enough to survive not knowing where she is going? Mark did not know the answer: Baba caught him so. In doing so, she did not get caught by not knowing.

Her hard work and her manic laugh cease only in the sound of a child's cry. Baba stands and looks steadily with that loud gaze, the loud silence in her eyes. What does the child's cry do to her? What does it hold for her? Does she then retreat to a bodily movement, run, to manage the anxiety that it stirred up internally? She goes to the swings and rides away from the cry, she goes on her friend's lap seeking some kind of closeness, twoness, perhaps a state of fusion. Swinging as a movement has a rocking quality. I think of the rocking of a cot or a crying baby in the mother's arms. The rocking silences the cry - cry as desire - rocking smoothens, numbs and puts to sleep. What does it numb, what needs to be put to sleep?

*Rob, Mark and Amanda. Amanda is on the swing and the boys look at her; is it the swing or Amanda that draws them in? Rob tells Baba she cannot go on the swing but Amanda invites her up. Baba readily sits on Amanda's lap and they take one laughing flight together. Pause. Another one. 'Oh two on the swing', a woman comments looking at me laughing. Another conspiracy. She is a member of staff, I haven't seen her before but I feel I do. Baba comes off. Rob and Mark want to have a go. 'Who is bigger? 'I am bigger. I am five and three quarters', Baba says to the young girl next to her. She turns to Rob, Mark and Amanda who fight over the swing 'I am five and some quarters'. 'Almost six' says the young girl. 'Can you stop talking?', Baba turns to the others: 'Guess how old I am. I am five and some quarters. Guess how many quarters' 'Five and four quarters' 'No' Rob: 'Five and three quarters' 'How did you guess?' 'Because you said I am five and some quarters'. They go back to Amanda and the swing.*

*'Who wants to come to the fairy woods?', Baba says loud and runs excited by the boys who try to go on the swing. She stops in front of a small cottage playhouse and laughs at herself: 'I am about to go in from the house'. She turns left. I follow her. She enters the garden. It is May's garden, I remember her walking through it. 'Hello little fairy', Baba kneels down, leans forward and touches gently one of the flowers, 'I am a big fairy'. She moves on, she tries to walk under a low edgy branch, she struggles and she gives up, she takes the path on the other side. She comes out. Loud: 'Never, never', she sticks her head out of the wooden wall that separates the fairy woods with the swing, 'never, ever pick the bluebell'. The children pause and listen. If they pick the bluebell, the fairy will be a witch and they will die. She spells 'die' quietly. 'Who wants to die forever?' Loud again. Did she say die or dive? 'Who wants to die forever, put your hands up', Baba asks the children. None of them. They stare at her thoughtful. 'Then never...', Amanda puts her hand up. Another child does too. Rob tells Baba. Baba registers it but continues as if they hadn't. 'Then never, never ever pick a bluebell'. 'I will pick one and see what happens', Rob enters the fairy woods. Baba follows him. I do too. 'Where are they?' Baba: 'I don't know'. Rob: 'There are no bluebells here'. They come out. 'I don't know if it is true', 'they said this at the Woodland walk'. She walks away thinking. She looks down. I follow her and suddenly she turns: I see her face in front of my eyes: A frown and a smile. Loud again: 'I don't think it is true'.*

*Rob and Mark fight over the swing. The teachers suggest that Baba and Amanda should have it instead. Baba is not interested. Dorothy asks the boys to sort it out*



*between them. I find myself observing the gradual letting go of the dying bluebell, how death randomly fades away in ordinary encounters, as if by chance. Baba wanders about. Rob has left the swing himself. They go near the new speed bump. 'I found the bluebells!', Rob shouts. I find him outside the wooden house, leaning over a pot with purple flowers. He looks at me through his glasses and he laughs. 'I found the bluebells'. I smile with him. I feel hopeful. Baba doesn't listen.*

Baba asks the children to guess how old she is but does not want to know all the answers; she cannot bear the voice that tells her she is almost six, old, older than she is. She runs suddenly to the fairy's woods. Where does she run to, run from? Does she run from a painful six years old world to the womb or does she leave the womb, the nursery to go into-the-forest-out-to-the-six-years-old-world with the sharp edges and the tangled branches?

In there, she can play out her tallness; she becomes the big fairy who meets the small fairy. Like the speed bump in the open path, in the fairy's wood there is also something that can kill her.

The story of Baba entering the fairy's wood and finding a flower that can make her die forever brings to my mind the story of Snow White who goes in the forest and falls into a deep sleep from a poisonous apple. Running away from her bad stepmother who envies her and wants to kill her, Snow White finds shelter in the woods and then in the house of the Seven Dwarfs who take her in and caress her. The Queen, that is, her stepmother, finds her and, disguised, she offers her a poison apple:

She makes a poison apple (the same object that induced shame in the story of the Garden of Eden). Snow White takes a bite and instantly falls down stone dead. The Queen's envious heart has peace (Ayers, 2003:94)

There is something edible in the flower as an object. The act of smelling, like biting or gazing, is a taking in. Bion (1977:58) captures this encompassing, comprehensive quality of the senses that are hungry:

being in sight is the same as being in the mind's eye and both are the same as being in the mouth

Citing Jean de Gourmont, Bachelard (1971:139-140) speaks of odorous images as ‘the subtlest, the most untranslatable of all images’, and of odours as musical notes, ‘rare sublimators of the essence of memory’; he goes on:

In days of happiness, the world is edible. And when the great odours which were preparing feasts return to me in memory, it seems to me, Baudelarian that I was, that ‘I eat memories’ (Bachelard, 1971:141)

The flower, like the apple, is beautiful and odorous and tasty, it feeds, it feeds the senses, it is a pleasure to the senses and for that it is desired. It is an object of desire. It seduces. Sometimes, as in the story of Snow White or in Baba’s play, it seduces and kills. It can make you die or die forever. It is a dangerous object because it turns out to be harmful. Or perhaps it turns out to be *also* harmful. It is an object that is good and bad. An object that feeds and preserves and connects and grows and an object that destructs, disconnects, attacks and annihilates.

In Klein’s object relations, objects are a constitutive part of the drives:

Libido and aggression are inherently directional longings aimed at specific eidetic images (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983:146)

Emotional life becomes thus a fluid space made of phantasies, ‘images of objects - internal or external - that constantly emerge from the drives’, and experiences (ibid:148)

In her early days, the infant negotiates the ambiguous nature of her objects and her ambiguous experiencing of the world by means of a projective split: the good parts need to be kept separate from the bad parts so that a going on being is ensured. Separate and other, the bad parts cannot overwhelm and destroy the good parts that the infant has internalized and identified with. Such split is a control, a mechanism, that protects the good feeding object from destruction and thus the self from the terror of annihilation. Gradually, and through the constancy of the mother’s physical presence and her capacity to take in and to survive her infant’s projective splits, the infant begins to integrate the good and the bad parts of their object and themselves and to take in the mother as a whole and other person. For Klein, this movement between the states of defusion and fusion is characteristic of the early emotional life that is revisited and reworked constantly throughout life. Sometimes, they come back forcefully in times of transition and change which threaten a sense of a going on being.

Does the flower that can make you die forever embody some aspects of Baba's phantasy of the destructive object? In it, Baba becomes a big fairy who finds a murderous flower and allows herself some benign control over an internal struggle between life and death, goodness and badness and negotiates some kind of separateness, some kind of goodness and some kind of badness, their boundaries, perhaps the possibility of some kind of goodness *and* badness.

I did not see Baba's bluebell that day and registering how gradually it faded into the ordinariness until it got left behind was not enough to keep me from being oblivious to it. Now, as I observe again Baba's sudden turn into the woods, I feel a sudden urge to see this flower and have a concrete image of it. Perhaps the very fact that I did not see it allows me now to write about it because it was preserved in a dream form in me until this day.

Bluebell is the English name of a flower, which, in botanology, is registered as *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* (unlettered). This name was given to it to distinguish it from *Hyacinthus*, the mythical flower that grew out of the blood of the beautiful Hyacinth who died during a game of seduction with his lover, the god Apollo. Wanting to impress Apollo, Hyacinth ran to catch the discus that his lover threw to him but was struck by it and died. The image that depicts this scene shows a flower that looks down. Its petals lower down as if they mourn. It looks different from Rob's flower. I do not know if Rob's flower is a bluebell but I would not like it to be. I feel that I do not want Baba's flower to have been found so easily, or at all, that is, to have been named. Winnicott (1965) speaks of the need to not be found as a way to preserve a self just as the infant begins to attain a sense of a separate self through the mother's failures to respond to her infant's calls. It is within these small gaps that a sense of a separate self begins to grow; these dissonances that reflect back parts of the self. What did I not want to deprive Baba of, in not wanting to have readily found her? For Winnicott (1965) the instinctive parts of the self that are invested with a feeling of realness reside partly in this uncommunicative part of the self that does not want to be found. Is Baba's flower instinctively invested, is it imbued with a sense of realness? What would it mean for Baba to have seen-found the flower that makes you die forever? Would my or Rob's or the children's seeing-finding it compromise it? Do I participate in her need to treasure its realness by resisting it thus allowing it to remain unfound? If it would become real in my eyes or Rob's eyes, if it was made real in a shared communion would it still be real in Baba?

May 2014:

There is a moment, when writing outdoes death. Writing outdoes death, for a moment.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Extract from personal notes

June 2014:

What does language do to loss? Language is a loss. It is a loss of a prior oneness. It is a something that grows from loss. Winnicott says that all experience is initiated upon an illusion, the illusion of an intermediate space. Is language an illusion?<sup>24</sup>

In the language of observation, seeing is naming. Does my resistance to find or to name the bluebell carry something of the nature of death? Does the bluebell dwell in a space between phantasy and reality, a space that needs to remain as such in order to remain alive in Baba? Would seeing-finding it kill it?

*(...) 'Can I be a fairy mermaid so I can fly?', Baba asks. 'Yes', says Erin. They move about, I lose them. 'Pretend that you really, really want to catch me', Baba says to Erin. She moves about again. She goes up. No, she is still down here but on the other side of the balcony. 'Pretend that you really really want to catch me', she says again.*

*It is time to go. I hear the clock bell from the street. It is the first time I do.*  
(Observation 11)

When Baba asks Erin to pretend that she really, really wants to catch her, what does she say? She names a desire to be caught but does she know already that she will not be caught? Found? Like the flower that makes you die forever, Baba escapes being found. As she does I become aware - I *can* hear - the bell of the clock in the street that signals the passing time and my time to go.

### 5.4.3 The wooden table

*Baba comes back. She leaves the piece of wood on the table and begins to hammer the nail. She turns to my side again. She has two pieces of wood now that are attached to each other. I think about how difficult it will be for the nail to stay.*

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<sup>24</sup> Extract from personal notes a month before the end of my observations

*Baba's movement is not strong but is not relaxed either; it is rhythmic, present, absent, present, absent. 'You know why I am trying to put this in?', 'why?', 'because I am trying to stick these two pieces together'. I feel tempted to talk to Baba about our ending now. Why now? She had just disclosed to me that she tries to keep her two pieces together. Mary comes over, she carries a table together with Steve and another man. It is old and big and bulky. Mary takes the tablecloth off the old table. At times, Baba looks to see what's happening –I feel that she knows what is happening- without taking her hands off her work. 'Where is this going?', one of them asks. They carry it outside. 'Excuse me, can we pass from there to take it out?', Mary asks me without looking at me, she looks at the space between me and the door. I move over to the other side. Baba continues her hammering. 'Almost' - the two pieces got almost attached, she looked at me happy, her face lit up and I feel tempted again to tell her about our ending. Why now? 'Can you help me?', the young girl saws another piece of wood. Baba looks at her saw for a moment and asks her to take 'the other one', 'the bigger', 'it will be easier', she says. The girl looks around the table for a moment and continues her sawing. Baba shows me the hole on the wood. She turns it over and brings it closer to me to show me how the nail has begun to go in. 'Baba', I say and she says something at the same time, she stops and looks at me, she waits. 'I want to say that I will come here 5 more times, until the end of the month, then I will stop'. She looks at me. Does she smile or not? Does she hammer? I don't remember. I can only recall the eyes of a young girl who stood between Baba and myself, was she here before?, and looked at me steadily in the eyes, with a wondering gaze, with a question. She turned around and went out the door as quietly as she came. I stay with Baba, in silence. I feel strongly tempted to ask her what she is doing next year, whether she is going to primary school. I feel the need to reassure her, to reassure myself, to escape separation, leaving, the staying with the leaving, the silence. I need to leave from this silence so that I stay with her. I don't say anything. Her hammering gets stronger and quicker. 'Yes!', she says. She brought the two pieces together. She lifts it up and shows it to me, her eyes nailed on it, laughing. She takes a second nail, it is bigger, a darker colour, and she begins to nail it next to the other.*

*Mary comes over, she holds the old tablecloth and she puts it on the new/old table. It fits. Yet, it looks small. I keep seeing its edges that the tablecloth leaves naked. The table itself, almost at the centre of the room, feels big. Unsettled. Uneven. The bookcase next to it feels alien now. Its colour. Its newness. It is uneven.*

*Margaret and Heidi come in. 'A baby hammer!,' Margaret shouts excited. Baba, smiles readily, yes, a baby hammer, she whispers, she looks at her hammer almost flattered. 'A baby table!,' Margaret throws herself on the table. Her voice is loud, hysteric. Where has she been? What happened before this? 'A baby big table', says Mary smiling as she straightens the cloth. Baba takes her eyes from her work to watch them. At times she keeps her gaze longer and I turn to see what draws her in. I see them sitting around the table, like a family, on a Sunday afternoon, the table is empty, they rest their arms on it, some of them keep their hands weaved together at the front. Their hands looks small, their bodies look small, different behind this table. 'Is it ok?', Mary asks softly. 'Yes', says one of the girls. 'It is for you, but what about Lewis?' I turn to my right and I see a young boy trying to sit at the table. Baba looks at him thoughtful. 'He would stand up', she says assertively. She goes back hammering her nail. The nail on the side of the wood falls out. She puts it aside and she continues. I become aware of the nail she tries to hammer, it is thick and it doesn't even have a sharp end – how will she ever nail it in? I watch her and I feel impatient again, almost hopeless. She maintains her coolness and hammers in confidence. The young girl sits at the table, alone, the table cloth is now gone, and makes a drawing. Baba turns and stares at it for a while. I turn to see it. It is a picture of a cone, like a mountain, a volcano. (Observation 26)*

Watching the big wooden table carried in the room made me feel that death was being brought in. Perhaps not death but a dead: there is something embodied, more alive than death itself, in this moment. A moment from childhood comes to mind. The table resembles the wooden piece of furniture inside the church, it looks like a table but it is not, an icon rests on it, four wooden legs grow from each corner of the table and hold a roof above it. It is Easter, it is sunny in my village, I am already wearing short sleeves, the doors of the church are wide open, people come and go yet somehow the space remains spacious. We have picked flowers from the field next to the old school and we have decorated the wooden stand; each of the four legs is now covered with threads of flowers that swirl around it, there are petals on the icon. When later in the evening I lean to kiss it, I find that it smells nice, I see traces of lips and lipsticks on it, the glass surface is fresh cold to my lips but there are people waiting behind me, waiting to kiss, the space is now crowded, people are gathered around it and pray or think. Then, I am in Athens, it is spring, evening, the son of the woman who lives opposite us died yesterday in an accident. From our balcony I can see the main door of the house, it is wide open, so are the

bars on the windows, I can see light in, people come and go, I imagine them sitting around a wooden coffin crying or thinking.

The wooden table is new, but it is old, it is big and low, and heavy, it arrives heavy carrying life with it. The younger children are not afraid of it; they play with it. Earlier this morning I saw them out in the balcony as they climbed and jumped on it conquering it. Now children are around it and their hands lie small on its hard surface. The table sits heavy at the arts room next to the tools table, it does not fit in and the small tablecloth does not make that better, rather makes it worse: it exposes those parts that remains uncovered, a wooden skin at the naked corners. I feel uncomfortable and uneasy having to accommodate myself around it, to find my place all over again. It is a baby table, because it is new, but it is not, because it is big and dark and heavy. What arrived with it? What has come in? What has gone? Baba, like myself, watched the removal - a concrete loss. There is something numbing, something mutely shocking about it: watching the old as it is taken away and the new as it is brought in. I look at Baba and I know she knows about it but she does not speak about it. What is she thinking? How does she think of a new table that is coming in just before she leaves? In the light of her return to the nursery earlier that year, how does she think of an old table arriving as new? Is it a good or a bad object for her? I think of reality as an impingement on phantasy, it comes in and forces a movement. The third that arrives and breaks the twoness, imposing a separation. When Baba uses a nail to keep the two objects together does she then also become that third other that comes between them? Can death here be reality itself? Change, loss, the movement away from our objects?

#### **5.4.5 Hammering**

*Baba hammers the nail on the lid. The nail bends, she takes it out and leaves it aside. She takes another one and begins to hammer it but the lid has a hole and it comes off. She sighs, she twists the lid once and watches it as it dances around the thin clever nail, and, weary and fed up, she brings it out before it begins to cease. She turns to the case with the tools and brings a new nail. She begins to hammer it but, this too, is small. I see the lid coming off the nail, easy, too easy, it slips out of it as easily as it slips into it, without effort, untouched, un-resisted, how can it feel itself without being touched?, how can it meet itself without resistance?, it is big, the hole is big and the nail too small, it is too big for this small, it cannot stay, I begin to feel emotional, I look at Baba trying to make it*

*stay, staying, she is almost six years old, she is the oldest, she is the tallest, she is the quickest with the scissors, her hair has grown most curly, I see her and I see me, together in these last days at the nursery, too big to stay, too big to study. What do I hold back from? The silence feels heavy. She looks for something. 'Will you stay here for the Edinburgh festival?', she asks me. I am taken aback. 'Half of the month', I say. She turns back to the tool case silent. 'Because the festival will start next week. My aunt will take me to some shows', she says. I hear: 'Stay', 'here', 'next week'. 'Half' I said. Why did I use this word? I could have said that I will stay for a little more time. Why half? She brings something back to the table. Then she turns again. I cannot see what she is doing. She stands in front of me with her back turned to me. I am tempted to move to the left. I don't. She needs me there. She finds the screws on the cut tree trunk at the table with the tools. She touches the trunk with her fingers. She takes a screw driver. She begins to unscrew the nail. Her movement is slow, it feels painfully gentle. It will take too long, I think. She takes it out and she brings it over, 'this is not strong there', she murmurs. 'There', she says as she leaves it on the table. She is sure. 'You know how I did it?', she asks me as she begins to screw it on the piece of wood in front of her. 'How?'. 'I unscrewed it'. She leans closer to it. 'It is not strong inwards', she says as she screws it, 'because you can unscrew it'. She begins to hit it with the screw driver softly twice. I feel impatient already. How can this big screw be moved at all with this small screwdriver? I feel the need to see her hitting it with something of its size, its weight. Something that can survive it. A woman comes in. I saw her at the reception this morning. She greets us. Her voice sounds loud. Outer. Maybe a little fresh. She leaves a box on the table. She murmurs something. That it is good. It is empty. Used and empty. It used to have soup. It says 'Miso' in bold black letters. Miso is the Greek word for half.*

*Baba got the hammer. She hits the nail with it. It is too big, too thick. Will it ever go in? Impatient again. 'Do you know why I do this?', she asks me with her eyes nailed down to the work. 'Why?'. 'Because I want to stick these two pieces together'. 'Ok'. She goes on. I hear Steve from the main room calling children to tidy up. She turns to the table with the tool case and as she does she touches my knee with her leg. She turns fast to the table and as she does she falls over my foot. She takes her piece of wood and brings it to the table with the tools. She takes a saw. She holds the piece of wood close to her eyes and she brings the saw slowly on it. I see her eyes behind it. She begins to saw it. Her movement is very light and very gentle. She doesn't saw. She moves the piece of wood a little further*



*down. She carves lines on the top of the wood. Many lines, short and gentle moving in many different directions. She leaves it. She brings a brush. She holds her wood up again and brushes the dust from the carving (Observation 30)*

What is it that makes Baba so interested in the tools? What does a tool do? What kind of object is it? Its quality is concrete, hard, mechanic, quick, sharp. A tool makes, it makes up for, it fixes, it does, it undoes, it connects, it disconnects, it solves, it works; a tool works. Does Baba work something internally, intensely, during these last observations?

In the nail and in the screw I see both, Baba big in her nursery and small in what follows. Rosenfeld (1988) discusses how Klein notes in her work with children their ongoing struggle between an irrepressible urge to destroy their objects and a desire to preserve them. Phillips traces in Freud too the two ends of the drives that are antagonistic in their aims:

Because our lives are driven by the wish for satisfaction, they are a chronicle of losses; but they are also driven, Freud maintains, by a peculiarly destructive part of ourselves, by the wish to die (Phillips, 1999:10)

For Freud, death is 'an object of desire' (Phillips, 1999:75). Baba tries to stay, to hammer the lid on the wood but the nail is too small, it slips through the hole, there is no resistance: there is nothing to sense oneself against. She needs a bigger nail. A bigger self. There is a weariness in this spacious space, a sense of trying in vain to meet an other, which is not there, something slips through it, there is no other to feel a self against, there is a sense of weary nothingness that surrounds this big space in which the nail cannot stay, it cannot anchor itself.

When Baba hammers the nail onto the lid, does she not also keep it shut? What is under the lid? The volcano in the drawing of the girl, a child's cry, the mother's perfume? Growth? Does Baba want to grow? Does the lid keep the numbers from going on? To defend against the fear of annihilation, the ego projects part of the death instinct onto the external object, which then becomes a persecutory object and turns the remaining destructive drive against this object (Rosenfeld, 1988). Is Baba's persistent hammering an expression of the aggressive aspects of her growth as she experiences them? Or is her hammering her aggression towards the intrusive growth and penetrating separation? Baba smiles at the sound of her hammer as a baby hammer: a baby hammer, a baby object, a baby persecutory object, it allows the baby her strength, it makes her aggression available, embodied in the hammer. 'I am here, I attack another as an other': it validates an otherness.

Baba hammers the nail, she screws and unscrews, she becomes both a libidinal and a persecutory object, who does and undoes connections. When the nail enters the lid, it penetrates it, but does it not also destroy it? Baba wants to stay, she wants to keep the two pieces together but in doing so, does she not also disintegrate them acknowledging their separateness? In keeping them together, does she not cut them in half? Is her nailing an act of connecting or disconnecting?

#### 5.4.6 Discussion

Centred around time and growth, I discussed death as it emerged in my time with Baba in personal, emotional and symbolic forms. I relied on some moments over the course of four observations where Baba negotiates something around death namely or where death appears implicit in my associations with Baba's play and in the light of our encounter. My discussion is primarily anchored in some psychoanalytic thinking on the death drive as found embodied in some forms of growth, loss, aggression, destruction, persecution, volatility, separation and disconnection tightly linked with the fear of annihilation;

By 1920 Freud needed the notion of a death instinct - a curious phrase in itself - to tell more persuasive, more convincing life stories (Phillips, 1999:78)

I encountered death embodied in the literal emotionless wording of numbers that go on forever; in the reminiscent scent inside an empty perfume bottle, in size medium; in the aggressive and limiting quality of a speed bump and in the unpredictability of the volcano beneath; in the search for the bluebell that is not found; in the depressive merged quality of a new old wooden table at the nursery and of a baby hammer; and in the very act of hammering.

Although there is an intense object quality in Baba's play, there is another characteristic quality that is dynamic, working and ongoing. There is a movement in her play about death, some kind of elasticity; it feels like an effort, a longing, a longing to, a longing not to; a movement against or towards something that is very present and makes the language of drives feel comfortable in my writing about her as well as rich and depictive. Looking back at the narratives, I trace this in the choice of words: I recognise it in the numbers that *'go on'*, in the second *'really'* of the *'pretend that you really, really want to catch me'*, her only comment about the new old table and the young boy that could not reach it: *'he would stand up'*. Along

with growth, and thus loss, there is something about this longing elastic quality that is also characteristic of time and of transience. Could time itself be thought of as a persecutory object?

Such movement is also encompassing of Baba's play with being found or escaping being found while I play with different meanings, that is, play finding her, as I really, really want to find her.

Thinking of Baba's play with Rosenfeld on behalf of Klein and with Phillips on behalf of Freud is expressive of this interplay, welcoming of such elasticity, of the movement between the object and the more dynamic quality that is present in Baba's play. My reading of Klein has not been static; each time I read her, I read her differently. She is, however, in me attached to the object quality that I first found in her. Moving towards a more relational reading of her object relations, I meet Rosenfeld's reading of her. There is a concreteness in this movement, a physicality that allows me to open up to encompass another meaning. It feels as though I change hands for a little. Phillips (1999:10) notices a playful lively quality on Freud's death drive, one that allows the child her generative curiosity about it:

And yet this fictional death drive – something of an artist itself – seems to want a particular, personalised death for us

May 2014:

Perhaps these are the deaths I can speak of. The plural deaths. This is the only way I can speak about death, in its everydayness.<sup>25</sup>

I thought of the above moments with Baba in the light of a trajectory that I traced both in the course of one observation and throughout the four of them. I have traced death as played out in the form of objects, acts, images as well as by means of some reveries to my childhood in the face of Baba's play. Still, this trajectory was in itself influenced by growth and loss as I thought them to be in Baba's mind. I thought this because I found Baba with knowledge about her age, her imminent finishing of the nursery and beginning at primary school, as well as the fact that she already had an experience of leaving the nursery.

Reading Baba's play in this light, I might be imposing a simplistic meaning or even rushing to confirm an information around which I then go on to develop my whole story. I think that

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<sup>25</sup> Extract from personal notes during the fieldwork

St.Pierre & Jackson (2014:716), in their thinking about analysis, do touch upon this urge to round the edges of a text, to find patterns, to find coherence and make sense:

In other words, if you think you have to find a theme, you probably will

Baba's play is very rich of meanings, stories, smaller and bigger, independent stories that grow like branches of a tree in various directions. I have developed my story around a story that made sense to me and developed from I knew about Baba. In doing so, I cannot avoid missing others.

I think of Baba's sunny face, the honey colour of her hair and her skin, her smiley eyes, bright, warm, smiley enough to recover their goodness; her name, made of two B's, two 'Ba's, twice strong, twice determined to survive the death I assigned to her; her colourful clothes - colourful enough to outdo the blue of the bluebells, her ritual dance - playful enough to dance away loss, her oldness and her tallness; old enough and tall enough to manage aggression. She is big enough to do this. 'Baba' is one letter away from 'baby'. It is also the Greek word for 'dad' when calling him: a father is third enough to name a separation. Do I call it - call him? - every time I call Baba? And then there is her exotic quality: exotic is enchanting, foreign, foreign is also alien, stranger, stranger enough to want to be met – to be found?

## 5.5 Eilidh

*'Everything is small without my glasses', she said and she brought me back into meaning. I remember that kind of meaning – unanticipated and clean. Unaware of itself. I feel met. It has been a while since I met myself in a child's words. I look at her. She goes away as if nothing had happened – nothing less ordinary than her everydayness. Does she think this way all the time? Is this way mine or hers? I look at her. I feel touched. She wears a pair of purple glasses that don't sit well on her face and she holds a plastic purple case. 'Is it?', I say. 'Yes', she says.*  
(Observation 1)

*With an enormous effort I rise from my seat only to find that I still seem to be carrying it around with me, only now it's even heavier because it's become the seat of my own subjectivity (Pessoa, 2010:22)*

Fernando Pessoa writes these lines under the name Bernardo Soares, one of the many heteronyms he used in his writing throughout his life. Pessoa did not treat his heteronyms as pseudonyms but as real others: persons, bodies with hair, with height and weight, with clothes, each with his history, his personality and his style in walking, in dressing, in writing. Is Bernardo Soares then one of the many heteronyms that Pessoa used to write under? With? Of? Or to?

Bernardo Soares is the author of *The Book of Disquiet*, a collection of passages that ask the question of the self. It is the book with which I met Pessoa, over ten years ago. Since then I have looked for him in little places. A part of me does not want to find him too much. I keep going back to his *Book of Disquiet* without, however, finishing it. I make it inexhaustible. Perhaps so I can return to it and postpone exhausting it. Pessoa's writing is in itself inexhaustible because it constantly moves; each time I read a passage I read it differently. Does it change with me; move as I move? As with the self, I cannot grasp it, have it, and quieten down. In its ceaseless change, it generates itself and asks again, in different clothes, the question of the self. I keep going back and it keeps slipping through my fingers. It slips through my fingers and I keep going back. With time, this movement becomes a habit. Unsettled, I turn to the book to find shelter and I do, each time. Each time, it survives my unsettledness and I am safe. Safe because it is not afraid of my unsettledness and because it does not look to quieten me down: we ask together.

Eilidh looks a lot like Pessoa. She, too, is my favourite child. I would arrive at the nursery longing to find her and when she was not there I found myself looking for her. Her play is like an asking; with it, and in it, she asks. Like with the Book of Disquiet, I kept on postponing this writing. This end. What can I write about Eilidh? She keeps on moving and she keeps on moving me. I feel I know her, yet, I am left with the feeling that I never really met her. I write about that. I write about how I cannot get (to) her, and about the blurred boundaries between us.

I ask: do I write about, under, with, or to Eilidh? Where is Eilidh and where is myself? Who am I drawn to and touched by? Who is Eilidh? Who am I?

This present writing is a way for me to ask these questions; perhaps it is a question in itself. In what follows I present some of my writing about Eilidh along with some of Pessoa's excerpts where he grapples with himself/his selves and I discuss both in the light of the blurred boundary between the self and the other. In doing so I treat them as pieces of a collage; lines of a dialogue between Eilidh and myself and Pessoa on the plural self.

I begin by presenting the diverse selves of Eilidh and Pessoa, as manifested in her presence at the nursery and in his heteronyms in his writing. I discuss the interplay between Eilidh and myself and between Pessoa and his heteronyms in the roles that we took for each other and through each other and disrupted for each other: as mothers, as adults, as researchers, as alones. I think about aloneness with Winnicott and try to make sense of it as that essential still silent centre that is not found.

### 5.5.1 Other(s)

*'I'll be the baddy', she says and begins to run behind Baba and 2 more girls ... She leans down, looks at me and roars: 'I am a monster'. Her voice is soft and gentle ... Her black long dress contrasts with the light sand. She is wearing two different socks, both colourful and stripy. She stands up and brushes the sand off her dress - she shouldn't get sandy: 'I am going to Seders tonight which is a Jewish holiday and my clothes need to be clean' (Observation 5)*

*She comes over. She shows me her feet. A thin white string is elegantly wrapped around her foot, through her toe, it embraces her ankles before it ends at the back of her foot. Her feet look thin, gentle on these sandals. She looks like an ancient actress, ready to perform at a summer theatre (Observation 20)*

*Ricardo Reis was born in 1887 in Oporto, is a doctor by profession and is at present in Brazil. Alberto Caeiro was born in 1889 and died in 1915. He was born in Lisbon but spent most of his life in the country. He did not have a profession nor any real education to speak of. Alvaro de Campos was born in Tavira on October 15<sup>th</sup> 1891 (at 1.30pm, so I am informed by Ferreira Gomes; and it is certainly true as his horoscope for this hour confirms) As you know, the latter is a naval engineer (from Glasgow University) but is now here in Lisbon, yet is not working.*

*Caeiro was of medium stature and although in fact was of a very delicate disposition he did not appear as delicate as he actually was. Ricardo Reis is slightly, yet only slightly, smaller in stature, is stronger and leaner. Alvaro de Campos is tall (1,75 metres – two centimetres taller than I am), thin and a little inclined to stoop.*

*They all have clean-shaven faces: Caeiro was blonde, without much colour and blue eyes, Reis a vague opaque swarthy colour and Campos somewhere between white and brown resembling slightly a typical Portuguese Jew; his hair however is normally parted at the side and he wears a monocle (Pessoa, 1985:20-21)*

*She makes a face with long curly hair. I wonder who she is. 'And here is my hair, long and curly'. Her hair is short and wavy. 'Here is my dress...and my legs, oh I forgot my face!' - I laugh but it is her face that she forgot - she makes two big eyes and a smile, 'and my arms', she makes her hands, slowly draws each finger in one continuous spiral line without taking the pencil tip off the paper (Observation 19)*

I am at the nursery and I look around longing to find Eilidh like a child that searches to meet the gaze of her teacher, to take me by the hand and show me the world. The world about which I could then go away and write, dream about. When I look for her, I long to see how she is; how she feels, how she looks, who she is today, the way she wears her clothes, the costumes she has on, the objects onto which she holds. I see Eilidh; is it her? She has a straw hat on, a long scarf around her neck, one glove on, she is busy, she works silently, focused on the scissors. Today is wearing a blue wig, long, shiny, frizzy. All these feel to me to be different skins; new worlds that move and move me. Each time I meet her she is an other. There is an ongoing mobility, a tireless and creative generativeness about her being to which I have grown attached. If this is an idealisation, perhaps it helps me to counterbalance my own feelings of

stagnation. Perhaps it counterbalances my bad, not ideal, parts of the self. Indeed, it is only after half way through my observations that I register a moment of 'badness' with Eilidh. In fact, I do not register it but I forget it. At the end of observation 19 I write:

Eilidh sees the girl's blue sticker. She asks to look at it. She tries to take it. 'I only want to see it', she says urgently, almost apologetically. She takes it in her hand, she looks at it, she is into it, she keeps it, she puts it on her belt almost naturally. It is a blue heart.

I have forgotten this specific instance which I remembered only after the end of the writing of my observation. Watching Eilidh I thought about her goodness and badness. I realized that this is the first time I do. I experience this as a cut through something solid and settled in my mind, a thought that breaks something and leaves a fresh trace behind, lighting up some corners. I have discussed about Eilidh's goodness or badness, yet, I think I have done so in a way that presupposes her basic goodness. From a position of goodness. In a way that did not pose a threat to her goodness, or to my goodness. Today, my forgetting reminds me that something needs to be kept away, some sort of badness that I need to protect Eilidh from, or protect myself from in remembering it and in revealing it.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps I idealise Eilidh because she gives me what I look to find as soon as I ask for it, that is, on my very first day at the nursery. Perhaps she allows me to become a child again, to be mothered and to be taught, to be shown something other than me. Or perhaps what she shows me are some of my creative and mobile selves projected on to her. These questions reveal to me the existential mobility to which Eilidh exposes me and encompass the question with which I started this research: is there a self to be found; a meaning to be made?

March 2014:

My demons sit next to me when I begin to write my first lines. My last year's experience is here with me, it has been with me all along. It seeks to be integrated. Most forcefully now as I begin to write. I am beginning, so, I am letting go of something else. I am writing through it. Children can survive my mistakes. They can survive my adulthood and I can survive my childlessness. They can survive our fusion. They survived it before. They survived it last year. Time is helpful. It helps me in a way I did not expect.

Time becomes the saving boundary between the self and the other.

Fusion feels creative. I am far from playing with it. Fusion feels creative from a distance. I continue to write through it. I attend it. Oneness and separateness. Blurred boundary. There is no meaning in this, yet, this feels most meaningful. I imagine myself running away from it only to return to it. There is no other way.

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<sup>26</sup> Note following the writing of the observation



There is no other meaning apart from the meaning that we make. The illusion of clarity, of separateness? I hold on to transparency. There is no meaning. Why did I go for it then? To be met: to meet the other in their experience and to be met in my experience. Relationship. Relational. Relatedness.<sup>27</sup>

April 2014:

Can I write about children's meanings without imprisoning the life in and of their meanings? Without pinning down their possibilities? Without explaining away their lives? Can I write about how it feels to be present in their world without losing their world, dazed by my presence in it? And even if I forgive myself for doing so, what is the meaning of a paper on the blurred boundary? On the never-ending layers of images of selves and others? The more I go on, the more they will go on.

This fusion feels dangerous.<sup>28</sup>

What is the purpose of this writing? I do not try to understand Eilidh, I do not look to find her into a moment and, like the other children, imagine her experience in it. Would she like that? I wonder. Rather I try to focus on the very fact that I do not find her and use my writing to ask whether this is okay, perhaps to focus on the fact that it is precisely this that draws me to her. It is this existential mobility that Eilidh embodies in her ongoing play with her identity (in her costumes, in her drawings, in her play) which I also read in Pessoa, embodied in his heteronyms. Eilidh and Pessoa, they wonder about the world through their own being, in the way they make themselves present.

Imagining parts of Eilidh as mine disrupts some of the order in all those layers of fixed meanings around Eilidh's identity (as a child) or my identity (as an adult or a researcher). Davies and Gannon (2006:7) speak of these layers as:

discursive habits that we peel away, not to find the 'real' embodied self hidden beneath, but in order to see the movement, the flow

Eilidh's mobility, the unbounded, ungraspable quality in her presence does not feel elusive but active, working, moving in plurality, making her present as becoming and becoming visible as a 'constituted and constitutive being' (Davies and Gannon, 2006:11).

Imagining parts of Eilidh as mine is also representative of some mobility. I need an other to see myself in. I need an other in order to ask about the self. An other that I meet or an other

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<sup>27</sup> Extract from personal notes upon starting my observations

<sup>28</sup> Extract from personal notes during fieldwork

that I invent to look for or to make myself with. To put myself on, to sharpen or to round the edges of my self against, to expand and to multiply, with which to make more of my self. Selfhood, for Cavarero is not attained from inside but given to us from outside; it grows from a relational practice. Butler (2001) speaks of it as the necessity to be exposed to one another:

In Cavarero's view, I am not, as it were, an interior subject, closed upon myself, solipsistic, posing questions of myself alone. I exist in an important sense for you, and by virtue of you. If I have lost the conditions of address, if I have no "you" to address, then I have lost "myself." In her view, one can only tell an autobiography, one can only reference an "I" in relation to a "you": without the "you," my own story becomes impossible

For Cavarero (2000) it is also desire that brings us to each other; a desire to be narrated. The desire for a story builds on the desire for identity: in search of self we want our story to be told, to hear ourselves alive.

Bachelard (1971:99) says:

Only through the accounts of others have we come to know our unity. On the thread of our history as told by the others, year by year, we end up resembling ourselves

In his heteronyms, Pessoa (1985:26) becomes an other so that he can write, so that he can tell his own story:

I have constructed within myself various characters, distinct from each other and from me, those characters to which I have attributed various poems I do not know how, in my own sentiments and ideas, I would have written

In discussing Pessoa's relationship with his heteronyms, Blanco (in Pessoa, 1985:24) says:

neither this work nor any to follow have anything to do with who wrote them. He neither agrees with what gets written in them nor disagrees. He writes as though to dictation, and, as though the dictating were being done by someone who might be a friend and therefore with reason be asking him to write what he dictated, he finds interesting –perhaps only out of friendship- what, at dictation, he is writing

There seems to be an otherness which although growing from the self is also alien to it. Independent of the self, otherness embodies itself in names, shapes, sizes, voices and colours; it evolves, changes, moves.

In this collage of selfhood, Eilidh becomes, in Pessoa's (1985:23) words, 'plural like the universe' as she flows in and out of different selves. In this universe, I find her a girl, a monster, a performer, a Jewish, a friend, a daughter, a sister, an assertive sister, a child who does not know how to use the scissors well. I follow her in each of her selves and each of them follows me back. I tell a story about her self and this story tells a story about myself. How do I flow in and out of Eilidh's selves? How does Eilidh flow in and out of her selves? What do we become for each other?

### 5.5.2 Mother

*How am I able to write in the name of these three...? Caeiro, out of pure and accidental inspiration, without knowing or even imagining what I was going to write. Ricardo Reis, after an abstract deliberation, which suddenly becomes transformed into an Ode. Campos, whenever I feel a sudden impulsion to write something, yet I know not what. (My semi-heteronym, Bernardo Soares, who, by the way, in many respects resembles Álvaro de Campos, always appears when I am feeling tired or drowsy and appears in such a way that his qualities of reasoning power and inhibition are a little erratic; his prose is a continuous reverie. He is a semi-heteronym because, although not being my personality itself, it is not different from mine, but simple a mutilation of it. It is I less the reasoning power and the affectivity. His prose, with the exception of the tenuous quid which is present in mine, is the equal of mine, and from the language point of view the Portuguese is exactly the same.*

*In any case, what has gone before provides you with the background to the mother who bore them. And what followed was that someone emerged from within me, and whom I christened that very moment Alberto Caeiro. Forgive me the absurdity of the following sentence: my master emerged from within me. That was the immediate sensation that I felt. And in all this it seemed to me that it was I, creator of everything who had the least to do with it all. It seemed that everything took place independently of me (Pessoa, 1985:20-21)*

*She turns the page. 'I need to write the names of the people now here', she says. She writes her name. And her surname. This is the first time that I see it. I know her name now. Her full, real name. Not the name I gave her. **Her** name. Not just her first name. All her name. Her family name. Her father's name. Her umbilical cord with a past, a future, a continuation, something larger than her, beyond her, that encloses her, she disclosed to me. She writes it along the paper. It has a 'z' into it. She pronounces it. I hear it. I listen her saying her name. This is who I am, she says. And this is who you imagine I am, she says. And this is who you are, she says. I see her as she takes herself back, back to her, I see myself letting her go. She is real. I need to spell her name. To listen myself saying it. I need her name to have a voice. She exists outside of me. And she will continue to exist outside of me. She will grow outside, out of me. And I will grow out of her (Observation 23)*

I think of naming as an exercise in othering; in making another an other. It confirms my self-ness, because I name from the perspective of my self. When Pessoa speaks about his heteronyms he does it from the perspective of Pessoa: he is one and they are many. Grigore (2011:44) acknowledges Pessoa's irony as the necessary distance between him and his heteronyms in order to begin to speak about the multiplicity and the complexity of the self. In fact, through the heteronymous possibilities Pessoa's project - the question of the self - remains indefinite in his ongoing questioning, his ongoing 'redefinition of the self'. Pessoa writes about the spatial dynamics of the distance between his heteronyms and himself. In this ontological distance, he moves hauntingly between - to and from and to - himself and his heteronyms. He says: I am their mother yet they are independent of me. I name them yet they master me.

I too, find myself inside Eiidh. When she tells me her real name I find myself hauntingly there. I am in the orange wing of the bird in her drawing on the day that I meet her in my orange top and in the three pencil tips that she takes as she leans towards the collage with her consent. I give her my name and I feel that she is taking something away from me.

Eilidh mothers me, she smiles to me with understanding, she draws for me, she sings to me and, with her song, she holds me. I have become the child and she has become my mother. Knowing her real name is the beginning of my growing out of her and her growing out of me and the name(s) I have given her. When I know her real name do I also grow out of her womb, does she give birth to me because she, then, finds me?

In search of self, I have left home to come to find my child, my mother; in this existential migration, I have become myself a child and a mother. I need a foreign space and a foreign

language to begin to know the spatialities and the syntax of myself. To arrange myself syntactically in my sentence, that is, my context. In holding Eilidh and in researching, I look to be held and to be found.

Why Eilidh? I am not Eilidh and I do not resemble her, yet there still is something very familiar about her. Perhaps it is because, like Pessoa, she migrates to other selves, persons, identities; she wanders, she wonders and there is something in her wondering that looks like a play: she plays with different selves. Does she look for a self? She moves, she flows, her becoming is not linear or static, she falls in and out of it, maybe not fall, she makes it, she does and undoes becoming and while she does, she also has a safe and grounded space to which she always returns. In returning to witness her wanderings, I think that I, a part of me, did so only to see her returning to this safe space. Is this space called self?

### 5.5.3 Adult

*I think with my eyes and my ears and with my hands and feet and with my nose and mouth. To think a flower is to see and smell it, and to eat a fruit is to know its meaning (Caeiro in Pessoa, 2006:23). If I stretch out my arm, I'll reach exactly as far as my arm reaches and not half an inch farther. I touch where my finger touches, not where I think. I can only sit down where I am (ibid:76) One day, like a child, I suddenly got tired. I closed my eyes and fell asleep (ibid:61)*

*I see them, sitting and holding their knives, real adult metallic knives, not plastic colourful ones. I recognize May's elegant posture and her direct gaze which is both wild and kind. Edward's back, his feet lightly and neatly placed on the floor under the chair. Eilidh's feet tangled clumsily together just before they step down and walk away, she goes to a girl, she looks at the cup with the butter by her plate, she leans over slightly and tries to look at her eyes or to appear in her eyes, the girl doesn't see her, Eilidh takes kindly some butter and returns to her seat (Observation 16)*

*The girl with the purple glasses appears from nowhere and stands in front of me. She holds her arm stretched out towards me, her palm facing down, her hand and her fingers are slightly loose. She doesn't look at me and she is calm and natural as if we know each other well. 'Look, it doesn't fall', she says. Where did she come from and why did she stop in front of me? I feel anxious with her absorption.*

*I look at her hand. She looks at it and her face is neutral, almost empty. I say 'the hand?' and she says 'Yes'. She turns her palm upwards and she shows me a little pink diamond stuck between her ring finger and her little finger. She sits at the drawing table. The diamond falls from her hand but she finds it and picks it up. She takes a piece of paper and begins to draw. I feel numbed, like the first day. Her coming is unexpected but somehow effortless. She comes with gifts, her meaningful statements, and leaves me feeling startled and wordless.*

*'I am Zoi' I say and she smiles. Her smile is understanding, adult-like. 'I am here to learn about children and I will come on Monday and Friday and watch you play and draw'. She listens carefully. 'Is it ok with you to watch you and to write about you?'. 'What did you say?' she said readily. I repeat everything. I ask her again. She says 'Yes'. Her voice is calm and her 'yes' sounds conscious and painless in my ears. I feel relieved because I feel she is ok with it. I feel reassured. Almost innocent. Who is an adult and who is a child? I ask her if we can make a picture of this and tell her about the collage. She leans closer to hear me better and as she leans she takes three broken pencil tips that were lying in front of me on the table; I notice them as she takes them, and I feel that she is taking something away from me (Observation 1)*

In his time with Alberto Caeiro, Pessoa became a child. For Paz (in Pessoa, 1985:42), Caeiro is 'everything that Pessoa is not, and more'. Caeiro is a man of the senses, he knows the world through them, in touch with them, innocent of thinking, he is the 'countryside': his poems are the ongoing observation of things that just are (Quintanilha in Pessoa, 1985). There is a groundedness and yet a transience - perhaps a groundedness to transience - in his manner that reminds me of Eilidh. I think of her as she turns herself into others, her masking is both alive as real and light as random, passing. Her costumes become her skins, yet, she changes them painlessly, unattached to them as if she is becoming them and observing her becoming simultaneously. It resembles the kind of awareness that Merton (in Pessoa, 1985:43) finds in Caeiro: 'a Zen-like immediacy ... a Zen way of seeing'. Perhaps what I am trying to describe is a groundedness to transience.

Paradoxically, these same traits that make Caeiro (an adult) also a child, make Eilidh (a child) also an adult.

I observe Eilidh as she plays by herself: her own self is enough to wander around with. Wandering but self-contained, self-contained in her wandering, sometimes I see her as an

island: she does not need me and that leaves me needing her. I come back each time to see her (ever) changing: if there is a constancy in her childhood, this is in constant change.

In Caeiro's poems, I read this intimate contact with things themselves through his own senses as characteristic of a child. In doing so, I assume that childhood is made of very specific things but even more so, I assume that it does not accept others. Eilidh tells me that childhood can use sharp metallic knives, that it does not devour, that it likes silence, that it thinks, it pauses and looks in the eyes, and thinks again, that it asks before it takes, and that it asks without words.

Soares (in Pessoa, 2010:22), Pessoa's semi-heteronym, observes himself wandering as an adult; as a child who grew out of belonging:

I suddenly remember as a child seeing, as I can no longer see it, day breaking over the city. The sun did not rise for me then, it rose for all of life, because I (still an unconscious being) was life. I saw the morning and I was happy; today, I see the morning and I am first happy, then sad. The child in me is still there but had fallen silent. I see as I used to see but from behind my eyes I see myself seeing and that one fact darkens the sun, dulls the green of the trees and withers the flowers before they even appear. Yes, once I belonged here. Today, however new a landscape might be to me, I return from my first sight of it a foreigner, a guest and a wanderer, a stranger to all I see and hear, old man that I am

In a darker reading of heteronyms, Pessoa is able to voice in his semi-heteronym's voice his estrangement to his own self. A stranger to himself, he wanders ceaselessly in different lands: different selves longing for a sense of selfhood and belonging:

I look for myself but find no one (Soares in Pessoa, 2010:134)

Is it his wandering that stole it away or does the lack of belonging leave him wandering?

Self-obsession goes hand-in-hand with self-division: a self looking, a self being looked at (O'Connell, 2011:328)

Absorbed in the observation of the self, unable to be refreshed by the world around him, he wanders seeking an innocent land, landscapes unseen, the day that breaks over the city, childhood itself:

I don't know if that gentle land forgotten on far-flung, south sea island is reality, a dream, or a mixture of dream and life. It is, I know, the land we long for, There, there, life is young and love smiles (Pessoa, 2006:325)

In my time with Eilidh, I too move between my adult and child selves. As an adult, I hold her in my gaze, like the diamond between her fingers; she does not fall. As a child, I ask for her consent. As an adult, I seek Eilidh as I seek an innocent land. Tied to her, I fly away from my stagnated old selves over to a ceaseless birth of new selves that, in their childhood, remain new-born.

#### 5.5.4 Researcher

*Eilidh stops and looks at a woman who stands holding a baby in her arms and speaks with a child. I look at her. I want to say hello. I cannot find her eyes. I slow down and stand for a while but she doesn't see me. I walk on and when I turn I find her gazing not-me, she is frowning, she stands against the glass wall and from there she observes the child and the woman, and she thinks about it (Observation 10)*

*Eilidh holds a braid of blonde hair - Rapunzel's hair. She tries it on, it falls. She holds it and stands in front of me. She dances around with the braid in her hands. She sees Norah, she goes to her, says hello and comes back. She begins to spin the braid. She stands in front of me and spins it fast; she looks at it, looks at the spinning, then the spin, then follows the spinning with her eyes, then looks at me behind the spin. 'It's like a fair swirl', she says (Observation 4)*

*All I've ever done is dream. That, and only that, has been the meaning of my existence. The only thing I've ever really cared about is my inner life. My greatest griefs faded to nothing the moment I opened the window onto my inner self and lost myself in watching. I never tried to be anything other than a dreamer. I never paid any attention to people who told me go out and live. I belonged always to whatever was far from me and to whatever I could never be (Soares in Pessoa, 2010:194)*



I recall myself going to the nursery, longing to find Eilidh, longing to find meaning. When I discover that she is not there, I find myself wandering in the nursery rooms looking for an anchor for my gaze, a reason for my going. I return to Eilidh, like I return to Pessoa, to find some answers about the self. Like Pessoa, the answers she gave me were her own asking, her own searching and re-searching.

As with Pessoa, I think of Eilidh's masking as an embodied way of asking. A way to ask with her body. She turns her self to a vehicle with which she can ask about otherness. It is her ongoing systematic return to it that makes it resemble research before my eyes. Her own research project. Observing her masking allows me to imagine what she might be interested in and how she is interested in it. How does she wonder? How does she ask?

She asks about the self in her masking, the ceaseless masking. In placing her body in different clothes, she occupies other spaces, she becomes others, she searches others, the self in the other, the self as an other and forgets her face in the other. Unlike Pessoa, Eilidh does not find herself in every other but forgets her self in the other.

She researches mothering by mothering me and now she does it through her eyes in her observation of the mother and the child; it is the frown when she observes that tells me so.

She eats with adult knives and then she gets up from the table and plays with Rapunzel, an object in her hands, a little object in her adult hands. I imagine Rapunzel as her own drives, bright silky blonde hair, a staircase, an umbilical cord that feeds her need to know, to constantly ask.

I imagine her play with Rapunzel as her very question. How does she ask? With her body, her self, she tries her on, she becomes her. Then, with Rapunzel, through a dance. She spins her and the endless spinning brings to mind her endless masking, a fair swirl, bright, she plays with it like she plays with her selves, she has turned her masking into an object and she controls it, she observes it, she looks at it and then she looks at me behind the spin, she can see - hold - both: transience and stillness, the masking and the self, the selves and the self, the question and the self who asks.

### **5.5.5 Alone**

*Ever since I was a child, it has been my tendency to create around me a fictitious world, to surround myself with friends and acquaintances that never existed (I*

*can't be sure, of course, if they really never existed, or if it's me who doesn't exist). Ever since I've known myself as 'me', I can remember envisioning the shape, motions, character and life story of various unreal figures who were as visible and as close to me as the manifestations of what we call, perhaps too hastily, real life.*

*...such things occur to all children? Undoubtedly - or perhaps. But I lived them so intensely that I live them still; their memory is so strong that I have to remind myself that they weren't real.*

*This tendency to create around me another world, just like this one but with other people, has never left my imagination. It has gone through various phases, including the one that began in me as a young adult, when a witty remark that was completely out of keeping with who I am or think I am would sometimes and for some unknown reason occur to me, and I would immediately, spontaneously say it as if it came from some friend of mine, whose name I would invent, along with biographical details, and whose figure -physiognomy, stature, dress and gestures- I would immediately see before me. Thus I elaborated, and propagated, various friends and acquaintances who never existed but whom I feel, hear and see even today, almost thirty years later. I repeat: I feel, hear and see them. And I miss them (Pessoa, 2001:467)*

*Eilidh sits at the bench in the corridor, she is ready to go; she has her light blue jacket on -zipped up, her bag, her glasses, the plaster on her eye behind her glasses, her hands weaved together resting on her lap, her thoughts. She looks down, pensive. Mary greets me quietly; I say hello, I pass by in front of her, I keep my eyes on her, one last try, 'good morning Eilidh', her frown remains, still, I leave her gazing at something I don't know and cannot know. Where is she travelling? (Observation 27)*

Some people concerned themselves with Pessoa's need for heteronyms, looking for the person behind them. His heteronyms have been thought of as roles that resist intimacy and allow him the distance he needs from others and from life (Jorge de Sena in Pessoa, 1985), a literary invention, or a wish that wishes in the third person not to be a personality (Octavio Paz in Pessoa, 1985). In her writing about the pleasure of masking and dreaming, Grigore (2011) speaks of Soares' Book of Disquiet as a geography of self-awareness, a term that feels encompassing of his whole work with heteronyms.

In self-awareness, who is aware? Is there a self that is aware of other selves? Is Pessoa the mother of his heteronyms? The question of motherhood resembles the question of creativity: do I give birth to what I make or does it give birth to me? I think of Alberto Caeiro, Pessoa's heteronym that I imagined as a child. Is Caeiro Pessoa's child or did Caeiro give birth to Pessoa once written? Is Caeiro Pessoa's mother, the mother who gives birth to the child Pessoa? When Eilidh offers me her real name near the end of our time together, does she own herself, free me from my motherhood and give birth to me as an other, a child who met herself when meeting her?

Pessoa's heteronyms are an ongoing birthing and a constant interplay of selves; through them Pessoa embodies the question of selfhood. Is there such a thing? Is there a self to be found?

Did Pessoa with his heteronyms mystify the idea of one self or did he demystify it, opening it up to its fluidity?

Thinking of Pessoa's heteronyms as spaces allows me to think about their interiority, their exteriority and the space between them. Instead of resistant to settle I think of them as consistent with the ongoing becoming encompassing both our inner and outer worlds that interact and constantly change each other. Instead of thinking them as masks and thus assuming the existence of one core self, I look to unearth in them the very act of masking, that is, the grappling with: the movement between the different senses of self as they are personally experienced.

Are Pessoa's heteronyms masks at all? For O'Connell (2011:341):

the masked man is a man, man is masked

His heteronyms are the embodiment of the agony of the existence. They ask, am I my masks? Am I my mask? Am I only my mask? For Grigore (2011), Pessoa both hid and expressed himself by means of his heteronyms. Winnicott (1965) speaks about the need to communicate and the need not to communicate. A child playing hide and seek, hiding yet wanting to be found, a game where:

It is joy to be hidden but disaster not to be found (Winnicott, 1965:186)

At the centre of Winnicott's (1965) theory of communication is the theory of object relations. The capacity to communicate depends on the capacity to relate to objects which, in turn,

depends on the environment. In the presence of a facilitating environment, the object that is subjectively perceived by the infant is gradually becoming objectively perceived moving from a state of mother-infant fusion to some separateness. During this movement, which is gradual, long and ongoing, the mother emerges as an other person. The mother as an other, that is as an objectively perceived object, is thus gradually created and not found. The emergence of the mother and of the self as separate entities is aided by some of her failures to adapt to her infant's needs, that is, in not being found. In its positive aspects, environmental failure allows the infant to refuse the good object, which is also a way of creating it. Taken to therapeutic work, Winnicott (1965) discusses how the client needs to refuse interpretation that is not attuned to the client's experience and such refusal, such 'not being found' gives back to the person an emerging sense of self and a validation of their experience through the acknowledgment of the therapist's limits of interpretation:

I think I interpret mainly to let the patient know the limits of my understanding.  
The principle is that it is the patient and only the patient who has the answers  
(Winnicott, 2005:116)

As Laing (1965) has discussed, there is a core part of the self that although driven by the need to be found refuses to be found, grasped, or understood as such possibility would mean that it would be engulfed, wholly consumed by the other.

In a non facilitating environment - an environment that has not facilitated the integration of the subjective and the objective perception of the mother object - the infant relates by half to the objectively perceived object (which results in the development of a compliant or false self) and by half to the subjectively perceived object developing an active or reactive non communication (Winnicott, 1965). However, Winnicott (1965:184) suggests that active non communication is also a part of healthy relating as integrated into it is that part of the self that by half relates to the subjectively perceived object, to the fusion, to the omnipotent feeling of being met, feeling, thus, real and true:

In the healthy person there is a need for something that corresponds to the state of the split person in whom one part of the split communicates silently with subjective objects. There is room for the idea that significant relating and communicating is silent

At this state, the person occupies an intermediate area where the object is not objectively *or* subjectively perceived but as both objectively *and* subjectively perceived, real and phantastic.

It is this intermediate area between phantasy and reality that Winnicott (1965:185) spoke of as transitional space, a space in which most artistic projects can be found:

In the artists of all kinds I think one can detect an inherent dilemma, which belongs to the co-existence of two trends, the urgent need to communicate and the still more urgent need not to be found. This might account for the fact that we cannot conceive of an artist's coming to the end of the task that occupies his whole nature

Are Pessoa's heteronyms silent communications from that intermediate space? Are they expressive of his insistent urge to be found and his need not to communicate? Is his constant oscillation between himself and his heteronyms, or even between dreaming and everyday life, a bridge between phantasy and reality? Does Eilidh play with such intermediate space? With her masking does she treasure some of her feelings of realness? Are her glasses her subjectivity, without which the world is small, as small as an object? When she treasures all the plasters, what does she treasure? What she sees or what she does not see? What is found or what is not found?

*This is the first time I see what is inside: children's coats and bags on the hangers and a bench. Erin is in there, Baba, Heidi, Runa, I stay outside and look inside, I see Eilidh who sits at the corner of the shelter. She is picking her nose, it is not her nose, it is her plaster, she is trying to peel her plaster off, a girl stands in front of her, and follows her movement with her eyes. Slowly, she peels its tip but the tip slips back, she finds the peeled tip again and slowly begins to strip it, a little more this time, she gazes at her friend's face, as if a mirror, she starts again slowly, and slowly she takes the plaster off, I see her eye again, it looks small, weak - infant? She looks down, she holds something, she has a big book on her lap, like a sticker book, it has many white numbered boxes and a starry night that fills the space around them. She sticks her plaster on it and as she takes her hand away I see a blanket of plasters, they are all there, the blue with the skulls on, the orange, the orange that I have seen, the orange I haven't, they are all here, resting on each other, faded, wet, dry, weaved into an Indian blanket, a mural, a soft layer, enclosed in a starry night. I imagine Eilidh these last weeks' nights taking her plaster slowly off, sticking it on her sticker book, leaving it next to her bed, lying her head on her pillow, sleeping. She looks at her plasters. She folds the sticker book and puts it in her bag (Observation 18)*

Is Eilidh's blanket of plasters, a constellation of stars in the night, bright; are they real or not? Like Pessoa's selves, a constellation of selves, a 'galaxy of poets' that he treasured attentively and long, as long as his life perhaps, are her plasters symbols of the fusion, the phantasy, that half aspect of the true subjective self, that 'little' that makes her 'larger than the entire universe'? Or are they symbols of a reality, the otherness that comes and makes the phantastic universe of the self existentially a little larger?

*To be a poet is not my ambition, it's simply my way of being alone* (Caeiro in Pessoa, 2010)

*She has moved at the seat by the glass wall and she draws now, silent, at times she raises her eyes and meets the voices at the table but she is alone, and well, she is ok, focused, she wants to do her drawing, it is on a big white paper, two big round lines, almost weaved with each other, like wings, there are some colours within, is it a butterfly?* (Observation 30)

For O'Connell (2011:334) aloneness resembles the boundedness of an island. Winnicott (1965:190) speaks about realness as that 'still silent centre to the personality', a kind of solitude that is part of the primordial experience. There seems to be an essential part of each person that is alone yet generative, encompassing of the parts that will remain isolate and unfound. The above moment in its quiet attunement feels like that. Eilidh brings something together in her drawing. In his letter to his friend, Pessoa speaks about the pleasure he takes in dreaming, that is, in the companion of his heteronyms.

### **5.5.6 Discussion**

What is it that makes Eilidh want to constantly change clothes, costumes, roles, characters? What is it that makes Eilidh not rest in herself, Pessoa in his name?

The child with her consuming interests, her inexhaustible questions, and her insisting body (Phillips, 1998:1) ...her profundity, according to Freud, was in the quality of her curiosity (ibid:16)

What kind of space do they make when they make - become - different persons and play with them? Do they hide an essential self or do they reveal an interplay between generated selves/inner places/identities?

I have thought about the question of the self in the light of Winnicott's thinking on communicating and not communicating, being found and not being found, and their interplay. Winnicott acknowledges that a sense of self is inescapably rooted in relatedness, yet an essential part of the self will remain alone even in relatedness. I have thought of my encounter with Eilidh and with Pessoa in the light of this ongoing interplay between fusion and separateness in order to consider the ways in which we connect with each other, carrying and mirroring each other, using each other to meet each other.

Starting with assuming some kind of separateness and fixity in our sense of selves informed by our gender, our age and our name we (Eilidh, Pessoa, myself) made each other available to be used by each other and challenged such fixity. Pessoa with his writing and Eilidh with her play broke the categorical fixities with which we first met each other and allowed me to engage with them and to think of my self/selves with their self/selves. In this interplay, we made each other by telling each other stories.





## **Chapter 6: Taking a step back**

In the preceding chapter I spent time with May, Nadia, Edward, Baba and Eilidh all over again, revisiting and reliving my observations with them through my writing. In each section, I brought together some moments from my observations with each of them. These were moments that spoke to the existential as I arrived in search of it. I wrote about them to inquire into the existential; how it makes itself present in children's encounters and in their play, the forms that it takes and the meanings they negotiate.

In this chapter, I take a step back and I bring together all five writings to see them against the background of the questions with which I started this inquiry, as discussed in chapter 1 and refined in chapter 3.

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss what came out of my search for children's existential encounters in the context of my observations of their everyday life at their nursery. I start with a discussion of children's existential encounters with the questions of nothingness, strangeness, ontological insecurity, death and selfhood. I move on to discuss how time, space and relationship - as inherent in the existential but also implicated in the method of psychoanalytic observation - manifested themselves in children's existential encounters.

In the second part of this chapter, I discuss my second research question: the space that psychoanalytic observation has for the existential with a focus on its onto-epistemological space to encompass the interpersonal and reciprocal qualities of the existential. I discuss how drawing on some relational psychoanalytic and some feminist ideas on liminality helped me explore these further. I then discuss the movement between psychoanalysis and existentialism, a cellar and an attic unconscious. I conclude with a discussion of the interpersonal unconscious in order to explain how the existential emerged embodied in symbolic dreamy, pictorial and sensory forms in some of my encounters with the children.

### **6.1 Children's existential encounters at the nursery**

During my time at the nursery, the existential occupied the space between the children and myself, embodying different forms, shapes and intensities in each encounter with each of them. As Scalzo (2010) suggests, children are not deprived of existential encounters because they are not deprived of living. The individual nature of the existential as it emerges in my

observations pertains to the individuality with which each child lives her life influenced by her unique background, character, relationships, choices and wishes. The existential does not emerge as a question *per se*, neither does it have the quality of a problem. Even though it plays out in imaginative ways, more or less explicitly, at times namely, it is present more as a shade or a quality with which the moment is imbued. It appears nuanced and elusive while its intensity varies not only with each child but also in each moment and each space with the child.

### **6.1.1 Existential encounters**

I thought about the existential with people who have come from psychoanalysis as well as with people who have been interested in an existential and phenomenological approach of the world in their philosophy, in literature and in psychotherapy. Still, I think of my writing predominantly as a dialogue between each child and a philosopher, author or psychotherapist interested in the existential, namely Bachelard, Camus, Laing and Pessoa. Baba (and death) is the only one of the children that I consider with the texts of more than one other person, which perhaps reflects my own transference to the topic at work as I discuss further below. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, feels more built into my thinking probably because it is built into my method, that is, the very I of the researcher, the way that I am present, observe and think of my time with the children. Still, at times I draw more explicitly on its different takes on countertransference and projective identification in order to think about the existential as it emerges interpersonally and reciprocally in our shared space with the children as well as in its intrapsychic imprint (Hunt, 1989).

#### ***6.1.1.1 Nothingness: May and Bachelard***

Nothingness did not emerge as an abstract concern but more raw, rooted in May's experience of the world by means of her body as she travels to faraway places in search for gold. In turn, an attention to her bodily experience gives life to nothingness as a moment of realisation in childhood. Moustakas (1966:10) speaks of the existential moment as a moment that is not defined by time, gender or age. It is a moment of feeling, of a reflexive solitude where you become aware of the emptiness or the futility of your existence; in this moment you 'hear your own inner dialogue, feel your footsteps and know them to be your own'. Bachelard (1971) too

talks about this moment when the child suddenly becomes aware of the self, astonished by being. Does this include the nothingness in being?

May's experience of the world and world's nothingness in my observations is characterised by a strong physicality. She searches by means of her senses and her body and finds nothing. In her play - her way of being? - she is in a lively - life? - search for nothing. Her search stays with me as attuned to the search for meaning in the face of life's inherent meaninglessness (Frankl, 1967).

#### ***6.1.1.2 Strangeness and absurdity: Nadia and Camus***

Camus (2013) meets the absurd in the day-to-day activity turning the familiar strange. Nadia and myself meet and find each other in the observations as if thrown into them, in the same way that we are thrown into life and wonder about it as something that matters in a personal manner (Heidegger, 1962). We became aware, through each other, of the act of observation as a strange act, a kind of doing that relies on and exposes a not doing. Nadia mirrors herself in my observing and allows me into some of her experience of being an observer in her nursery, a stranger to it. She allows me to observe her observing, observe her wandering and turns my attention to the space of her wandering. Blenkinsop (2012) uses an image of students standing at a bus stop to unsettle assumptions of freedom and belonging in educational settings. It is by means of her very wandering that Nadia comments on the absurdity of the nursery - the world - as a space of doing or constantly becoming and by means of her 'strange' presence that she questions the space of the nursery as a space of belonging, the world as a place in which one feels at home.

#### ***6.1.1.3 Ontological insecurity: being here: Edward and Laing***

In my pairing with Laing (1965) and his demystification of ontological insecurity as inherent in living, I looked to tune into Edward's evocative play as expressive of his ontological sensitivity; to his attunement to presence and absence in their interplay as both interior and exterior states of being. His capacity to play them out in symbolic ways, yet to concretise them - by the movement of his hand, the volume of his voice, in hiding and seeking his own body - turned some of his play into a raw representation of a very abstract yet fundamental and thus discomforting state of being where one is in touch with being in itself as an uncertainty.

Edward and myself, we used each other as a self and other engaged in a questioning of the interiority and exteriority of existence. With his play Edward asks: am I here if I am loud, if I am fast – faster?, if I hide, if I am buried, eaten up, if I am broken off, if you do not see me?

#### ***6.1.1.4 Death: loss and growth: Baba***

Unlike May, Nadia and Edward, who wondered in their play about nothingness as nuanced in doing and in being, Baba is a child who named death. She wonders about it alongside ‘forever’, bringing to it a concern about continuation or permanence. She asks: ‘numbers go on forever after you die, don’t they? And then, ‘who wants to die forever?’

In her play, Baba also personifies death, that is, her experience of it: it is found in the reminiscent smell of an empty perfume bottle; in the texture of a wooden table; the size of a baby hammer; the colour of the bluebells; and the sequence of numbers. Unlike with other children, I did not engage only one other existential thinker to think about with. My thinking is instead informed by Klein’s early object relations theory that encompasses death in the form of annihilation in the face of separation and loss. Heidegger (1962:282) too speaks of loss as our closest experience of death as living beings:

Death does indeed reveal itself as a loss, but a loss such as is experienced by those who remain. In suffering this loss, however, we have no way of access to the loss-of-Being as such which the dying man ‘suffers’. The dying of Others is not something which we experience in a genuine sense; at most we are always just ‘there alongside’

Baba asks about death, loss and separation by means of her play; she plays out her asking through words and symbolic objects and by triggering my own memories of loss, separation and death. She expresses a relationship with death (Yalom, 1980), her experience with death as she senses and imagines it. Her play is expressive of her meaning of it in the context of her life, hence expressive of her being in relation with it - which is something given in the face of her being-in-the-world - and her responses to this relationship.

#### ***6.1.1.5 Selfhood: being me: Eilidh and Pessoa***

Eilidh dialogues with Pessoa about the question of the self as plural and relational. Eilidh questions the self as a singular entity through her generative play, her tireless masking, the way in which she goes in and out of costumes, roles and identities. Pessoa does so through his heteronyms, by moving in and out of characters, persons that he makes who have different names, features and lives and exist alongside each other.

Why is it not enough for Eilidh to rest in her self? Why does she refuse just to be her self and decide instead to try out different clothes, costumes, characters, roles and occupy other spaces, selves and times?

Heidegger (1962:220) speaks of curiosity as one manifestation of our fallen-ness into the world:

Dasein has, in the first instance, fallen away from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self, and has fallen into the world

Far from home, the world is then a place to which we long to belong as we engage in a ceaseless search for the self by means of our very being in it. Or is our very being-in-the-world a ceaseless search for the self?

Psychoanalysis helps to think about this question relationally with its attention to the mother-infant relationship as that first self-other relationship that allows a sense of self by means of an other. Winnicott (1965) adds to that the thought of a sense of self emerging not only by being mirrored but also by not being found by an other or else being failed by the significant other, thus allowing the self to emerge from the confrontation with one's own edges and boundaries. Taking this back to my time with Eilidh, what in her drew me readily in, how close to her yet far from finding her I felt by the end of our time together, I think of how the reciprocal use of each other (I looked to find Eilidh who kept on changing) was also an escape from each other, from being found, confirming also the fluidity in being and in meaning as they escape being captured.

### **6.1.2 Time and space**

Time and space are imbued in the existential as an inescapable boundary (Heidegger, 1962, Scalzo, 2010). In my observations, time and space emerged tightly tied to the existential and

at interplay with it. They became a context; both a limitation and a possibility. The children found imaginative ways to play with them negotiating their sense of being in them.

#### ***6.1.2.1 Time and space of the observations***

The existential emerged in the context of the specific time of the day, the day in itself, the closeness to the beginning or the end of the hour that I was there, the closeness to the beginning or the end of my observations and to children's beginnings at primary school and endings at nursery. It also emerged in the context of different spaces of the nursery and the dialogue between them: interior and exterior; closed or open spaces; spaces made for specific use and others that invite a wider movement within them; babies rooms and staff rooms; the long and narrow close path to the nursery; and the boxroom at the corner of the main room.

Nothingness emerged in the context of an idle immobile moment on a warm summer afternoon in a playground empty of children. Edward became lively present as I arrived each time. Nadia was less strange near the end of the observations whereas Baba's hammering intensified as she approached the end of her time in the nursery. Eilidh voiced my existential disquiet on the first day of my observations; with her adult hand she took my hand and showed me around until the day we left.

#### ***6.1.2.2 Time and space as personal context***

Time and space shaped the existential also by the way in which they occupied the bodies of the children and myself personally: the age that each of us arrived with, and gender and colour and language as spaces, other-worlds, that appear with us and invite associations about who we are, what we do and where we live. One can wonder whether these basic, raw materials with which we meet each other - time and space in their exteriority and interiority - are themselves enough to stimulate a question about existence; perhaps it is not time and space *per se* that are existential, but the attending to time and space and the way in which they become existential in the encounter with an other, especially an other who triggers questions about sameness or differentness and inevitably turns the attention to the self. My aloneness as an observer in encounter with Nadia's aloneness, my gender in my encounter with Edward, my age and my culture in dialogue with Baba's age and her exotic appearance stand out as a context that is present, both powerful and generative.

Time and space, as they are personally implicated in the encounters between children and myself, shaped what we made of each other and encouraged questions about who we are: it is, thus, not the questions *per se* that were existential but the engagement with these questions that were posed by means of our very presence in each other's eyes and what we imagined of us.

#### ***6.1.2.3 Being in time and in space***

In my time with the children, the existential relationship with time and space did not appear outside of the time and space that each of us occupied personally; instead, in our relational space, we reached out and wondered about time and space as givens while being firmly rooted in our own personal relationships with them. Therefore, the existential encounter with time and space didn't appear as a concern about time and space but as a concern about being in time and space. As such it took the form of being and doing; doing nothing, losing, growing, becoming, being, being strange(r), being here, being here? being forever, being me, being me? being alone.

#### ***6.1.2.4 Time and space implicated in the children's existential encounters***

May's play is characterised by a strong spatiality. She searches by means of her body. She is very present in her surrounding world, bringing it to life by means of her body: in her walk in the jungle and her travel to a faraway place. Such bodily and sensory searching is also present in Bachelard's (1971) phenomenology. They engage in a kind of storytelling, a phenomenological inquiry that is attentive to textures, smells, colours, shapes, sizes and qualities as they are personally experienced.

Nadia's being in the nursery is imbued with space. Wandering in the nursery Nadia exposes its boundaries, its spatial limitations. As a stranger to it, she unsettles the assumption that the nursery is a familiar place for a child; the world for a person. As a wanderer into it, she challenges the expectation to do - to play - as opposed to being into it.

Edward plays with space in its wider existential form. With his play he challenges being in space, he makes smaller spaces and tests his presentness and his absentness in them by means

of his hiding and appearing, burying and finding, shouting progressively, moving fast and faster.

Time is central in Baba's play. In my writing, I have thought of her play with death in the context of her imminent ending at the nursery as well as symbolic of her negotiation with loss in the face of her growth.

Finally, Eilidh plays with times and spaces. She is experimenting with them, bending them, shrinking them, changing their clothes and hair, and looking at them through different lenses. She goes in and out of them in pleasure, rather than in agony, playing with them and in return they give her different selves. She thus turns space and time and self to something fluid and non-static, challenging the idea of them as fixed or singular or something to which we are subject.

### **6.1.3 Relationship**

The existential encounters that emerge in the time I spend with each of the children are communicated in diverse ways encompassing various processes, internal and external and in dialogue with each other. Children call me to their relationship with the existential through their play, their way of being at the nursery, towards others and their selves as well as the relationship that we form together.

#### ***6.1.3.1 Children's relational encounters with the existential***

The existential is not expressed only explicitly or by words. The children, who are at a transitional stage between a pre-verbal and verbal time in their preschool years, convey the existential symbolically, in a metaphor that takes the form of an object, an image or a sound, through qualities as manifested in colour, shape, size, degree, intensity and texture. They thus reveal a subjective sense of the existential as it is individually meaningfully located in its personal context, nuanced and fluid. The subjective meaning encompasses different processes interwoven with each other - emotional, cognitive, historical, environmental and unconscious - yet it remains expressive of a relationship which is inescapable due to the very being-there or else the Dasein position in the world:



Dasein is never 'proximally' an entity which is, so to speak, free from Being-in, but which sometimes has the inclination to take up a 'relationship' towards the world. Taking up relationships towards the world is possible only because Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, is as it is (Heidegger, 1962:84)

#### ***6.1.3.2 The existential embodied in the relationship between the child and myself***

I met children with my interest in the existential, which is communicated in various non-verbal ways, through my presence and my attention or else the nature of the inner space that was available for children to use and play with. What comes out from my time with each child is that the existential in question is also embodied in my relationship with the child. Children reflect myself and mirror my own existential concerns relationally (Renstrom, 2009).

Nothingness, in my time with May, came to life in the face of an immobile childhood. Immobile as an internal quality in childhood, an immobile becoming in moments when nothing happens; May's story gave rise to a reverie to a moment of my childhood, a moment that feels both concrete and more shady in that it resembles a feeling and a state to which I can still return from an adult place, that is, to childhood as a state that is always present (Philo, 2003, Bachelard, 1971). It is a moment when nothing happens. Both our stories, May's and my reverie, do not have an end; meaning breaks down and we are both left facing nothing. Nothing to find or nothing more to happen. In our idle moment, May and myself, engage actively with nothingness in reverie, in what Bachelard (1971) calls the phenomenology of creative imagination. Between phantasy and reality, we oscillate while being in touch with nothingness as both, inherently present in living, awaiting at the corner of a story where meaning breaks down and as dry of desire, empty of a life object (a repressed child cry for a life object) that triggers the will - the need? - to make meaning.

Alienation and a need to relate to each other (or a sense of guilt for not doing so) interplay during my time with Nadia. The strangeness that we share emerges in the light of our context. We hold tightly on to our differentness (child-adult, observer-observed) in order to resist the sameness that we share as wanderers. We also hold on to and make use of the power that occupies the act of observation in its reciprocity. Nadia uses her own share of power in a very meaningful manner: she does not give me what I am there for, instead she observes my observation and questions it and, in doing so, she tells me a story about both of us as observers, strangers to our lives.

Being with or being here is a question that Edward played out and that I also find embodied in my role as an observer. Early on in our time together, I felt a concern about how I could be

with Edward. During my negotiating discussions with the staff team about the days of my observations, there was a tentative suggestion to come in on a day when Edward was also there. Edward himself recognised me at the nursery (I was not a stranger to him) and acknowledged my coming each time I arrived and he was there; when our eyes met I felt his gaze like an umbilical cord that drew me to him and could not but follow. Both the nursery and Edward wanted me to be there. Yet, when I was finally there, I was confronted with the question of *being there* (Heidegger, 1962): what permeated our time together was a fragile sense of being, an interplay between presentness and absentness, withness and separateness which was played out by Edward in his play. My ambivalence at being with him is also reflective of my difficulty in staying with the ambivalence of being that is triggered in his play. To respond to this, I rely largely on Laing. The fact that Laing is a man and Scottish reflects also a caring maternal and attuning impulse for Edward. In my thinking of his play, a Greek woman interpreting a Scottish boy, I pair up with a Scottish man, as if to compensate for my differentness, and to care for him from a place closer to him.

In my writing, I thought about Baba's play with death largely in the context of her being the oldest child at her nursery who had returned to do one more year before moving on to primary school. In reciprocity, I think that her allowing me into this story of hers mirrors my own need to return to the nursery - a resistance to ongoing growth - and to stay longer in it through my observations and my research.

The question of selfhood is found embodied in my relationship with Eilidh. In the course of our observations, Eilidh experiments with different selves. We swap roles; she becomes a researcher who looks into the question of selfhood through her everyday play and the people, the others, with whom she is. She becomes my mother who sings to me and guides me as I look to find her. In doing so, Eilidh breaks open the child-adult binary, she loosens the fixity of gender and age with which we meet each other and gives us permission to move between them. Moreover, in her constant change of selves she invites me into (and perhaps mirrors) my question of the realness or the essentialness; the question of a core self: who am I? Am I only one thing?

## **6.2 Methodological conclusions: the space of psychoanalytic observation for preschool children's existential encounters**

### **6.2.1 Moving between: liminality and fluidity**

Drawing on my past experience with psychoanalytic observation as a method of observation of children's development, one of my questions in the present research was to explore the space that psychoanalytic observation has for children's existential questions. Specifically, how I can stay with the blurred boundary between the observer and the child in the face of subjectivity and how I can encompass an integrative understanding of children's existential encounters in the light of both the inner worlds and their confrontation with existential givens. I have found that a relational psychoanalytic (with its attention to the interpersonal unconscious) and a feminist (with its attention to being and meaning as fluid and ongoing) informing of the method has helped me to occupy both those liminal spaces and think of children's existential questions between the self and other and between the inner and the outer.

I begin my section with a discussion on how moving between psychoanalysis and existentialism helped me with an integrative, more encompassing, understanding of children's existential encounters. I focus on my movement between different theories and different ideas about the unconscious.

I continue with a discussion of the interpersonal unconscious and how it has helped me to locate meaning between the child and myself. I conclude with some of the symbolic unconscious articulations of the existential in pictorial and sensory forms.

#### ***6.2.1.1 Between psychoanalysis and existentialism***

In my analysis, I move between psychoanalytic and existential ideas in order to invite some generativeness in meaning; a kind of a kaleidoscopic view that looks to encompass more than one way of being and encountering the world. Stolorow (2013) and Laing (1965) have used a blend of psychoanalytic and existential ideas to help them understand their patients' sense of the world in the light of their mental illness: how they experience the world in the face of emotional trauma and from a place of a separate divided self. Both unpack mental challenges to their psychic manifestations and think of them in the light of the person's continuing experience in and of the world. I draw on the psychosocial dialogue that they initiate in their work but employ it to understand how it informs the everydayness, and how more or less challenging or else more or less everyday states of being in the world move in a continuum, encompassing different intensities and frequencies as we constantly move in and out of states of alienation from the world and negotiate our sense of self in it.

I have brought such an approach to my research to inform my thinking of children's existential encounters. As kaleidoscopic, it acknowledged children as equally engaged in the above negotiations, although in different qualitative and expressive manners from adults (Scalzo, 2010). As integrative, it acknowledged the children's psychosocial experience in the world and allowed to explore how their existential encounters dialogue with their interior worlds.

Specifically, both Klein and Freud helped me think of nothingness in the light of early phantasies about the self and the other. I read in both Klein's positions and Freud's castration anxiety a space to think of nothingness in the light of annihilation, grounded in the child's wishes or fears of her goodness and badness as well as the power of her own desires and her inescapable growth. Winnicott's (2005) thinking of the mother as someone who is acknowledged as an other helped me think about selfhood in early years; a time when the child depends on an other not only to survive but also to begin to have a sense of self. Throughout my writing, my thinking is subject to the presence of such significant other, either in the form of an internalised other or myself as an observer other, who evokes or invites children's phantasies. The intrapsychic imprints of the existential are attached to that other. In this light, I think of nothingness as being dry or empty of an other; strangeness as an other-less wandering; ontological insecurity in the light of being seen; growing as centred in the loss of a prior oneness. While I move between different theories and strands in psychoanalysis, I draw less on existentialism as theory and more on people who inquire into the existential by means of their writing. With the exception of Heidegger, whose being-in-relation underlies my thinking about my being with the children throughout, I used existentialism more as an approach (Scalzo, 2010), a phenomenological attention, rather than an interpretation. This approach was closely linked to time and space because it stayed with children's lived experience of the existential encounter. In addition to thinking of them in the light of children's internal fears and wishes, I thought of nothingness, strangeness, being-ness and death in the light of their present awareness of their being-in-the-world in the specific time and space and the meaning they make of it.

A kaleidoscopic approach allowed children's experience to remain central and invited different theories with which to think of it, hence allowing the existential to try out different spaces, more or less self-enclosed, past-, present- or future- oriented (Sartre, 1993). This in turn allowed meaning to be more attuned to its fluidity, to incompleteness, to the mess and the uncertainty of the lived experience (Hunt, 1989).

My bringing together different ideas with which to think about the children draws on a feminist influence of research as a writing practice that is an ongoing inquiry. I did thinking with theory by writing it and my writing became an inquiry into meaning (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005).

Thinking of research as an inquiry into the inherent fluidity of the unstable world (St. Pierre and Jackson, 2014), rather than an unearthing of static truths, allowed me to occupy a liminal space; a space between different theoretical perspectives with which I could think about children's existential encounters.

Cixous (2003:4) says:

all that is stopped, grasped, all that is subjugated, easily transmitted, easily picked up, all that comes under the word concept, which is to say all that is taken, caged, is less true. Has lost what is life itself, which is always in the process of seething, of emitting, of transmitting itself. Each object is in reality a small virtual volcano. There is a continuity in the living; whereas theory entails a discontinuity, a cut, which is altogether the opposite of life. I am not anathematizing all theory. It is indispensable, at times, to make progress, but alone it is false. I resign myself to it as to a dangerous aid. It is a prosthesis. All that advances is aerial, detached, uncatchable.

#### ***6.2.1.2 Between a cellar and an attic unconscious***

Apart from moving between psychoanalytic and existential ideas I also moved between different ideas about the unconscious; I treat these as a continuum that encompasses some more or less interpersonal views of the unconscious reflecting also some more or less open spaces for the existential.

Freud's (2001c) unconscious meets the outside inside, the universal in the personal deepening the inner space by unearthing more layers within and uncovering more connections with the outside. From an existentialist perspective, May (1983) questions the storage space of the unconscious: the very 'un' in the 'un-earths' and the 'un-covers'. He is interested, instead, in the expansive potential of the unconscious focusing on generativeness in place of latency and on personal meaning:

We find new words because something of importance is happening on unconscious, unarticulated levels and is pushing for expression; and our task is to do our best to understand and express these emergent developments (May, 2007:26)

Freud's view of the unconscious is linked to the idea of repressed loving and destructive phantasies that govern us. May (2007:209) views wishes as playful imaginings of possibilities,

as 'demonic' forces that are imbued with meaning; wishes are not forces alone but forces joined with meaning, invested in life energy and directed towards the future:

If wish is only a force, we are all involved in an abortive pilgrimage which consists of simply moving back to the state of the inorganic stone again

May (2007) does acknowledge in Freud's theory of the unconscious some creative cues that more modern psychoanalysts with a relational view also largely acknowledge (Ogden, 2004, Bollas, 2007):

...he must turn his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient. He must adjust himself to the patient as a telephone receiver is adjusted to the transmitting microphone. Just as the receiver converts back into sound-waves the electric oscillations in the telephone line which were set up by sound waves, so the doctor's unconscious is able, from the derivatives of the unconscious which are communicated to him, to reconstruct that unconscious, which has determined the patient's free association (Freud, 2001d/1912:115-116)

May (2007) traces the generative unconscious implicit in Freud's work on dreams and free associations but finds it absent in his talk about the fulfilment of libidinal wishes. Instead of solely blindly subject to libidinal urges, in the existentialist view we are subjects who relate; as psychosocial creatures our wishes connect thus with our total personal experience in and of the world and manifest themselves in symbolic personal meaning. On this basis, May (1983:171) questions a view of the unconscious as that 'blank check upon which any explanation can be written' as deterministic; untied from the theory of libidinal fulfilment, the unconscious unfolds to myriad play-outs of personally meaningful wishes, as many as the persons.

Drawing on Jung's dual image of the cellar and the attic, Bachelard (1994:40-47) uses the metaphor of the house to discuss the interplay between the cellar unconscious and the attic experience:

In the attic, the day's experiences can always efface the fears of the night. In the cellar, darkness prevails both day and night, and even when we are carrying a lighted candle, we see shadows dancing on the dark walls ... then there are the stairways: one to three or four of them, all different. We always go down the one that leads to the cellar, and it is this going down that we remember, that characterises its oneirism. But we both go up and down the stairway that leads to

the bed chamber. It is more commonly used: we are familiar with it. Twelve-year-olds even go up it in ascending scales, in thirds and fourths, trying to do fifths, and liking, above all, to take it in strides of four steps at a time. What joy for the legs to go up four steps at a time. Lastly, we always go up the attic stairs, which are steeper and more primitive. For the bare the mark of ascension to a more tranquil solitude

As with moving between theories, thinking about the unconscious from a place between psychoanalysis and existentialism, that is, attuned to both the inner and the outer world, allowed me to think of it as encompassing of the person in her complexity. It allowed me to think of it more as expressive of subjective experience and less as confirming of theory. Applied to the work of interpretation, an urge to make connections between experience and theory can disconnect meaning making from its relational nature, which, as with every relationship, is not deprived of power. What about the very act of interpretation exerted from a space of authority, that is, from a space that one is afforded with in order to make an interpretation as in the case of research? What about the influence exerted from this location; of this location? What about the need for interpretation; the need to make meaning of another? What about the person who makes meaning of another? What about her own unconscious?

Thinking of the unconscious as both cellar and attic helped me to view children's encounters with the existential psychosocially, that is, acknowledging its reciprocal direction: how it writes internally as it is encountered externally and how it is imbued with one's own personal history, including one's own unconscious wishes. Implicit in this is the view of the unconscious not only as enclosed but also as receptive of and shaped by the personal experience.

These attentive qualities of the unconscious bring to mind the qualities that are present in Bachelard's reverie. Bachelard's reverie is permeated by an attentive silence, one that invites other times and spaces into the present ones. Bachelard (1971) spoke of reverie arriving in moments of idleness; an idleness that has nonetheless a working quality and a concentrating direction rather than a scattering one. Still, like the receptive unconscious, it looks outwards, opening up to and encompassing of the other more from the place of oneself and less from the place of theory.

The idea of reverie as an unconscious-to-unconscious dialogue inspired an exploration of the existential as it was interpersonally encountered in the unconscious communication between the child and myself. It helped me think of the children and of the time that we spent together or else of what happened between us when we met without departing from the inescapability of subjectivity. This meeting is not deprived of concrete individual differences: it is made with

them. I arrive with my gender, my age, my language, my colour, with an interest and a history, and with a dynamic internal space that expands and shrinks, takes in or resists in relation to what it encounters. In addition, I encounter the child in her own dynamic individuality. In considering unconscious communication I am therefore considering the unconscious communication between the child and myself as this is coloured by our individual characteristics. I am looking at a communication between our individual characteristics, our ages, our cultures, our genders and the power they exert to each other unconsciously.

For Cixous (1993:74):

a woman who writes is a woman who dreams about children. Our dream children are innumerable. The unconscious tells us a book is a scene of childbirth, delivery, abortion, breast-feeding. The whole chronicle of childbearing is in play within the unconscious during the writing period (...) Writing does not come from the outside. On the contrary, it comes from deep inside (ibid: 118)

Cixous' unconscious is personal:

But what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another (Cixous et al, 1976:876)

It is open to being shaped by the outside, the social. Writing from the body is a means of revealing the personal, the historical, the repressed that has managed to survive in the unconscious:

Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth (Cixous et al, 1976: 880)

Jones discusses feminine writing in the light of Cixous:

Of her own writing she says I am there where it/id/the female unconscious speaks ...to the extent that the female body is seen as a direct source of female writing, a powerful alternative discourse seems possible: to write from the body is to re-create the world (Jones, 1981:251-252)



Writing my countertransference and my transference to the children with Cixous makes my unconscious personal because it gives voice to its context. I come into my psychoanalytic observations as an other person - an other unconscious - a woman who observes and writes about children embedded in a personal, social and cultural location. Located between the children and myself the existential grows partly out of such personal socio-cultural embeddedness.

Among the children, what is it that drew me close to Eilidh so early on? What seduced me in Edward? Why was I so actively invested in forgetting Nadia? Whose is this forgetfulness? I look at it as a call that asks me to follow it and dwell on its source, that is, on the blurred boundary between Nadia and myself. And I look to the self to begin tracing the other that brings me back to the self; to the otherness of my own self, of which I have been forgetful or from which I have been drawn away.

### **6.2.2 Interpersonal unconscious**

Using psychoanalytic observation as my method invited an attention to the unconscious dynamics of the relationship with the children. As I discussed in my introduction, one of the reasons behind and purposes of this research was the exploration of the space of psychoanalytic observation for existential encounters. I wondered how I can address the existential nuance in children's play in the context of psychoanalytic observation, and how I can think about the child and myself meeting each other interpersonally and mutually in relation with life's existential givens.

Over the course of my observations, I became increasingly aware of the intensity of my personal responses to my encounters with the children, which continued after my observations were finished, in my thinking, my writing and my dreaming. They arrived in my everydayness, often encompassing parts of both my everyday life and my history interwoven in my experience with the children. My encounters with the children were not solely restricted to the time, the space or the people involved in the encounter but inclusive of another kind of encounter with the children of which I am less aware.

Relational psychoanalysis speaks about such communication in the form of reverie and or the analytic third but Bollas (1997) addresses directly the active function of the unconscious, not only as a storage of repressed wishes but also as receptive and creative. Bollas develops his thinking from his re-reading of Freud, who first spoke about the unconscious having 'a wider compass' (Freud, 2001c/1915:166). Bollas' unconscious bears resemblances to May's (2007)

view of the unconscious in their generative potential. Applied to psychoanalytic observation, the idea of a receptive, creative unconscious influenced my method interpersonally and reciprocally, and made space for the existential to be thought of accordingly.

In the next section, I discuss how interpersonal unconscious communication allowed me to imagine the existential in its reciprocity and how it appeared embodied in metaphors of characters, images, sounds and scents.

#### ***6.2.2.1 Symbolic unconscious articulations of the existential***

In our encounters, children communicated their existential concerns relationally: sometimes they allow me into their experience with the existential by evoking strong feelings in me and other times they personify what is more shadowy in the form of an image or a memory in me. Positioned with subjectivity in qualitative research, I have invited the use of the self through psychoanalytic methodology. Paying attention to the relational dynamics of transference and countertransference helped me to think of the existential in its reciprocity. What emerges is made of both the child and myself.

In the course of my observations, some existential encounters were communicated unconsciously yet embodied themselves in articulate forms (Bollas, 2007). Among others, strangeness appeared as a character; reverie as an imagery response to nothingness; and death in the form of a background sound and a reminiscent smell.

##### **6.2.2.1.1 Character**

Freud (2001c/1915) speaks about words serving purposes of displacement. He develops his thinking about schizophrenia; nevertheless, it gives me an insight into the insistent presence of my Stranger, or my insistent holding on to him, during my time with Nadia. The Stranger emerged as a single thought and a note, a word next to an observation with Nadia and lingered – unknown - until I began to unpack it in my writing. Where did the Stranger live until then? When he was still an association, an unknown thought that fleetingly wired to something - wired enough to insist and fleeting enough to remain unmet - where did he reside?

Words are subjected to the same process as that which makes the dream-images out of latent dream-thoughts – to what we have called the primary psychical process. They undergo condensation, and by means of displacement transfer their cathexes to one another in their entirety. The process may go so far that a single word, if it is specially suitable on account of its numerous connections, takes over the representation of a whole train of thought (Freud, 2001c/1915:199)

In the case of the Stranger, a character emerged from a single word in my analysis. Until then, it stood waiting, an awkward word, unbaptised, a person without a name. According to Freud, substitution does not depend on the resemblance of the content of the words but on the words themselves. Indeed, the life of Camus' Stranger has nothing in common with Nadia's life or my life *per se*. It encompasses and it names a quality of strangeness that we share, each in our own context, which we have not met until we meet each other. Repression, according to Freud, denies the translation of the object into words; yet, the word presentation of an object does not equal consciousness *per se*:

Being linked with word presentations is not yet the same thing as becoming conscious, but only makes it possible to become so ...It turns out that the cathexis of the word presentation is not part of the act of repression, but represents the first of the attempts at recovery or cure ...These endeavours are directed towards regaining the lost object, and it may well be that to achieve this purpose they set off on a path that leads to the object via the verbal part of it, but then find themselves obliged to be content with words instead of things themselves (ibid: 202-204)

In this context, can I think of my Stranger's lingering presence as my ongoing attempt to recover a strangeness in the now and to become acquainted with it? Does he embody the reciprocity of the unconscious communication: Nadia's experience of me along with my experience of Nadia? In this context, is substitution a masked cry for 'cure'; a call apart from a retreat? Is, this, the unconscious not expressive of the repressed alone but also expansive and future oriented like May's (1983, 2007) and Sartre's (1993) unconscious? Does the Stranger allow me to know a little more about Nadia and a little more about myself?

Born out of our encounter, the Stranger is a character that speaks to the strangeness that Nadia and I shared in our time together. As well as giving birth to it, we are subject to it because we are subject to strangeness as an existential given that we share. Thinking the strange(r) from a place between psychoanalysis and existentialism, I become aware that it demystifies its psychoanalytic quality and personalises its existential quality. It creates a space where strangeness can move between the individual and the reciprocal. In this space, I get closer to the individual by acknowledging the reciprocal, while the reciprocal is revealed by looking

closely at the individual. Our common encounter with the existential givens is revealed in the reciprocity of the interpersonal unconscious. The existential is known in relation to, in a person-to-person, unconscious-to-unconscious relationship that allows it to be worded, pictured, symbolised, that is, formed and communicated and perhaps to find some relief by means of an other.

#### **6.2.2.1.2 Images**

Some unconscious qualities of our existential encounters at the nursery found a symbolic outlet in images. May's reverie of finding nothing has stayed with me as an image that invited me to respond with another reverie, an image, a moment from my childhood that took me to nothingness as meaninglessness. For Bollas (2007:53), imagery is a language of unconscious articulation:

At times we think in pictures and when we speak them, even though they are immediately subjected to the category of language, wording is none the less able to transfer the imaginary into its own articulated realm. We can imagine along with the speaker, thinking in pictures

Bachelard (1994) speaks of images as that which gives logos to perception. I think of my reverie as a continuation of May's chain of associative thinking, the content of my reverie as a response to May's story, an unconscious-to-unconscious communication by means of images. Portraying the sophisticated nature of the unconscious as a form of thought, Bollas explains:

as Freud implies, the analyst free-associates to his patient, drifting away through associative pathways of his own riding the patient's narrative, sometimes like a child following a storytelling parent, or a scientist stopping to ponder a thing or two before catching up again. An idea, an image, a word falls out of the blue and often these are riotously anticontextual. This complex psychic movement -a kind of countertransference dreaming- reflects the analyst's consistent topographical response as he transforms the patient's material according to the laws of the dream work (Bollas, 1997:12)

For Bollas (2007:77), an image serves unconscious purposes:

like a condensed dream fragment it is rather ready-made for the unconscious. It can be more easily internalized and helps the clinician to think about a highly complex matter

Reverie is a kind of imagery that brings to mind Bachelard's (1994:88) poetry as that which gives:

concrete form to a very general psychological theme, namely, that there will always be more things in a closed, than in an open, box

Edward is such a poet. He says looking at me: 'my tummy wants to make a picture' and his words stay with me as an awakening, as poetry, an image to dream on, a riddle that asks me to know it.

Edward's imagery is different from May's. May's reverie is a complete image in itself that evokes in me a reverie, an image-fragment from my childhood that is reminiscent of an elusive sense of nothingness. Our reverie-to-reverie, image-to-image communication allowed nothingness or meaninglessness to emerge from the centre of our individual histories; May's and my storying of it. Edward speaks in images; he performs the existential with his body, his voice, his play, his questions, and his performing stays with me as an image that captures me and invites me to decipher it. Eilidh also questions selfhood by performing it, as she appears to be someone else each time I meet her. With both Eilidh and Edward, the existential seems to be embodied in their play - the play images they offer me - and the way they make themselves present in the space during our observations. Still, it is in the context of psychoanalytic observation that I register the existential by registering what it evokes in me, and in this latter case it evokes surprise: each time I meet Edward and Eilidh I stand in awe of them, what they say or do.

Imagery, either in the form of reverie or as performance or appearance, expresses the existential in a symbolic form. A symbolic pictorial form encompasses those existential qualities or encounters that are unacknowledged or entirely unknown, unarticulated, nebulous, unshaped. Yet, it is entirely personal and speaks to the other by evoking an equally personal response. The unconscious parts of existential encounters are projected onto symbolic forms that evoke a response (identifying sameness with May and being surprised by Edward) attracting attention to them.

### 6.2.2.1.3 Sounds and Scents

In his theory of the creative unconscious Bollas (2007:8) suggests that every patient that talks to her analyst is free-associating. The unconscious can be traced in close reading of the narrative of both the analysand and the analyst, including the narrative of their encounter and its sequence. To illustrate this, Bollas brings in the metaphor of music and discusses voice, the colour of the language, density, rhythm, silence and moments of errors or surprise as cracks into the unconscious:

Silence, too, may be thick with meaning, even if it is not manifestly evident. A silence between thick verbal textures may well be in accord with the overall composition ... In music, there is also a form of sound termed 'silounds' which refers to the other sounds that one can hear when the composer creates silence. These might be the sounds of people moving about in the audience or someone coughing ... In addition, silence permits one to hear that music theorists refer to as 'biomusic', the sound of the non-human sound-world surrounding the participants ... An analysand may be silent in order to speak something through the biomusic, even if this is accidental music, so to speak. But allowing the sounds of the outside world to speak within a session has unconscious significance and is part of the subset of the order of silence (Bollas, 2007: 42-46)

I think of my encounters with the children in terms of voice and sound and I become aware of Edward's progressive intensity of his 'O o o' as well as other emerging moments of silence that we shared and that made space for a sound, an image, voice to come in. It feels as if, in these moments, the child and I secretly agreed to make space for an other to come in and speak for us. Such moments of sounds in silence stand out in my writing about Baba and our negotiations with death and loss. I remember the silence that follows the moment when the wooden table arrives at the art room: the heaviness that surrounds the silence; its weight and its density to which both Baba and I consented. How do these qualities of silence link reciprocally with the associative memories of a wooden coffin that emerged in me? I am also attracted to the sound of the street clock bell of which became aware well into my time at the nursery and near the end of that hour when Baba looked to find the flower that makes you die forever. The clock bell did not follow Baba's search but came at a moment when Baba had already given up on her search and, forgetful of the flower, she plays with Erin and shouts to her: *'pretend that you really, really want to catch me'*.

Smell, like sound, encompasses the embodied qualities of the existential; what is not readily articulated or thought about. Alongside texture and temperature, it is prevalent in my reverie with May, becoming the umbilical cord between May and myself, the present moment with

May and a past moment of my childhood, bringing them to life in their details, the familiarity and the absurdity that they share. Baba brought smell into her play with death, implicit in her search for bluebells, the flower that makes you die forever, as well as her search for an aroma in her teachers' empty perfume bottles at the nursery, while playing with numbers that die or go on even after you die. Baba's play invited a response in me in the form of a reverie to a moment of my childhood and to a reminiscent smell of my mother's perfume on a morning when she was going to work while I stayed home, ill.

A moment that something still vague and abstract is known by the senses follows through and survives time, carrying a momentary realisation embodied in it. Such a realisation could not be acknowledged alone; instead, it remained pending until it was encountered in this moment shared with Baba. Baba's search of an absent aroma in the context of a game with death met or awoke my memory of a reminiscent smell that had not been realised until that very moment. It is the nature of the existential - the airy, shadowy, incomplete, fragmentary - that can find a home embodied in symbolic forms. These forms implicate the senses: how it is written in the body, in sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste, and remains there encompassing the unarticulated, that which is still in process, distant and impalpable. Such knowledge is realised relationally by means of an unconscious-to-unconscious, senses-to-senses communication. Character, imagery and sounds and smells as they were stirred in my observations with the children are both embodied forms of the existential as well as symbolic forms of unconscious communication that point also to children's unconscious creativity (Bollas, 2007) in their play with the existential.

#### ***6.2.2.2 Reciprocity***

A rethinking of the unconscious in interpersonal terms loosened the power of my interpretation by acknowledging not only subjectivity but also reciprocity in my relationship with each child.

Given that my observations were deprived of a personal knowledge about children's context (apart from my knowledge about Baba's attendance at the nursery upon which I relied in my thinking of her), my meanings are deprived of a historic quality that connects children's play back to their experiences. I do not, however, think of my interpretations as generalized or generalizable comments based on psychoanalytic theory. Instead, I used my self as a personal other (by personal I mean another person who arrived at the children with her gender, her age, her language, her history, her unconscious, her interest in them and her interest in their existential encounters) with whom the children are in relation and who plays with meanings

of the existential in the context of our unique personal relational space. My meanings are therefore situated in the context of our shared space that is not only relational but also reciprocal. The view of the relational space between the self and other as also reciprocal is found in relational strands of psychoanalysis that speak of an in-between third space born out of the meeting of both the therapist and the client, and their lives. Ferro (2002) draws attention to how the interpersonal unconscious space is also expressive of the therapist's personal history and discusses the therapist's reverie as reflective of the patient's attunement to the therapist and, thus, as a potential way in which the therapist can be changed or healed by the encounter with the patient.

Applied to research, such a view takes me back to Hunt's (1989) contemplation of an existential psychoanalytic informed research methodology wherein both parties are exposed to the raw lived experience of the research and are changed by their encounter with each other. The children and I are then equally alive to each other's presence and equally alive to existential givens. Given some knowledge of my background, I have acknowledged some encounters with the children as calls to my history. However, my interpretations of the children did not look to exceed the space between us or to make suggestions about their experiences outside our relationship. Instead, they were about how our relational space became an arena for the existential to emerge in reciprocity.



## Chapter 7: Conclusions

Cloke et al (1991:77) say that with their work they aim:

to retrieve these experiences from the academic netherworld and to return them  
to everyone by reawakening a sense of wonder about the earth and its places

Their work is in the field of human geography but their approach to contribution to knowledge speaks to me and to my hopes for this work. Cloke et al (1991) speak of knowing as a personal process of wondering; an intimate encounter with the world we are already in and which we forget or forget to notice. There is something about their view that is especially meaningful for existential encounters, that is, encounters with givens of our existence from which we cannot escape or be without. With this work, I look to explore the existential encounters in early childhood in preschool years. Just as my encounters with the children awoke me to my childhood by means of memories, images and senses, the present work looks to awaken its readers to a reverie of their own childhoods and their personal encounters with the existential. For that, even though it grows out of an adult academic womb, it looks to be a child-to-child, reverie-to-reverie encounter about the existential. Or else, a reverie of the existential from the place of an adult who has been a child.

In searching for the existential in preschool children's everyday lives through psychoanalytic observations, I have found children encountering nothingness, strangeness, ontological insecurity, death and selfhood, playing them out in imaginative ways and symbolic languages. The existential did not emerge as a question *per se* but was embodied in their play and in their stories; in the way they were present and the relationship that we formed together. It emerged elusive as a quality, a shade or a nuance embedded in a movement, in a voice or a gaze. Along with the body, time and space emerged implicated in children's existential encounters as a context. Finally, looking at the existential through psychoanalytic observation allowed me to explore an integrative approach towards it, thinking of it as fluidly located between the child and myself and our interior and exterior worlds.

In the next section, I look at how these findings can speak to other areas, the limitations of my work and some recommendations for future research.

## **7.1 Tracing connections**

### **7.1.1 Research with children**

The present research speaks to a space identified in literature for a study on children's relationships with the existential, particularly children in early or preschool years. As discussed in the literature review this gap can be partly linked with the developmental focus on children's capacity for abstract thinking and reasoning as well as with the adult need to protect children from their encounters with existential concerns. This results in dismissing or bypassing an everyday reality that is a given for very young children, just as it is for older or for adults, by their very existence and their very being in the world (Scalzo, 2010, Heidegger, 1962). The present research contributes to the limited work on young children's existential questions (Pramling and Johansson, 1995) a study on preschool children's relationship with the existential by means of observations of their everyday lives at the nursery.

The view of children being always already in relationship with the existential because they are always already in relationship with the world dialogues with a nascent existential-humanistic approach in child development that acknowledges the child's also relational and existential presence in the world (Buhler, 1951, DeRobertis, 2006, 2008, 2011). Such approach can in turn dialogue with education and psychotherapy as those fields that work with children's subjectivities and their personal histories, emphasizing their capacity to observe themselves and the world around them, reflect and make meaning of their lives and their anguishes through their relationships and their work at school and in therapy.

A number of people have namely discussed the integrative existential – psychoanalytic approach to understanding the personal experience in philosophy (Sartre, 2014), in psychotherapy (Stolorow, 2011, 2012, Laing, 1965) and in research methodology (Hunt, 1989). The above writings, however, are restricted to the personal experience of adults and, with the exception of Hunt (1989) who proposes an integrative research methodology, to therapeutic contexts. The present research draws on their work and suggests an integrative existential-phenomenological and psychoanalytic approach towards children's existential encounters in their everyday contexts.

With its attention to the interior world of the child and its interplay with the outside world, specifically how the exterior world is internalised through the child's phantasies, fears and wishes, the present research speaks to a body of literature on psychosocial research (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009, Hollway, 2008, 2009, 2011, Rustin, 2014), that focuses on how the

unconscious is encountered in the social, and how the self can be used as a reflexive tool in researching the other. In particular, it contributes a children's research to a body of research on the specific application of psychoanalytic or psychoanalytically informed methodologies in social sciences research that is largely concerned with adulthood (Shuttleworth, 1997, Bingley, 2003, Urwin, 2007, Hollway, 2010, Elfer, 2011, Rustin, 2012, Bondi, 2014b).

Recent developments in relational psychoanalysis, allow a deeper exploration of the reciprocity in the research relationship. Such focus helps to explore further what both the child and the researcher bring to their encounter, how they are both implicated in the meaning that they make of each other and how they carry parts of each other in ways of which they are less aware. It loosens the fixities in gender, age and culture and breaks the child-adult, child-researcher binaries that are predominant in social sciences research with children, informing discussions on research representation and otherness (Philo, 2003) and on an adult power monopoly over children (Christensen & Prout, 2002, Gallagher, 2008). With its ontological focus on the blurred boundary between the researcher and the child, psychoanalytic observation speaks to the discourses around power in research with children and offers a view of the researcher's inescapable subjectivity as a tool rather than a bias; an opening to research as a space of reciprocal meeting and knowing for both the child and the researcher.

### **7.1.2 Meaning and interpretation**

Drawing on some relational psychoanalytic and feminist writing in my research, I have explored the liminality and reciprocity in the self-other encounter and the fluidity in meaning in qualitative research into the personal experience. Thinking of meaning as a common trait between research and therapy, I think this approach can in turn inform therapeutic practices as relational practices that work with interpretation. The idea of persons and histories meeting reciprocally readdresses the balance in the role and the power of the interpreter. The rethinking of the unconscious in relational interpersonal terms is a significant part of that. The therapist or the researcher uses their own self, including their unconscious, as a receptive organ, as a tool that can help to begin to imagine and unpack the experience of the other person. In this light, therapy and research are acknowledged as relational practices wherein the therapist or the researcher relies largely on the self (rather than on one theory or on the illusion of separateness) as she is subjectively present in the shared space. Rather than an essential truth that awaits to be uncovered attention is paid to the capacity to relate to an other and to engage together in a generative process of meaning making.

Winnicott (2005:3) speaks of that intermediate space that is made of both, reality and imagination as they are indivisibly interweaved with each other:

A third part of the life of a human being, a part that we cannot ignore, is an intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute. It is an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated

The present research grows from such space and looks to push the boundaries of the self-other, inner-outer binary in research with children by viewing meaning and agency as fluidly moving between the child and the researcher, their psychic and the social worlds. Relational psychoanalysis allows for interpretation to be viewed as something other than a monolith that exercises power over an other: it can be seen as an owning of one's own subjectivity (Aron, 1992), a communication of one's own limitations (Winnicott, 2005) and a creative play between two persons, their histories, their phantasies and their powers (Bollas, 2007). Such a view has begun to inform some psychotherapeutic work with children (Altman et al, 2002, Altman, 2004, Horne, 2006) but is more absent in social sciences research with children. The present research draws specifically on relational psychoanalysis and the idea of the interpersonal unconscious to inform a methodological approach that encompasses subjectivity and creativity in the interpretative process in research with children.

## **7.2 Limitations and recommendations for further research**

With this work I explore how meaning making as constitutive in the practice of research into the experience of an other, is not only influenced but made possible through subjectivity and through the owning of one's own subjectivity, hence choosing one's own meanings. One of the main purposes of my kaleidoscopic approach to meaning making is to afford a similar space to children, that is, to imagine them moving in and choosing from a wider spectrum of meanings in their experience.

Yet an integrative approach in research can be viewed as overly abstract. Bringing together or staying in between can represent an escapism in the light of freedom, or a resistance towards choice, responsibility and thus, ultimately, subjectivity. Frankl (1967) speaks about potentialism as a way to escape responsibility and postpone meaning. I think of this limitation in my research against the incomplete fragmentary nature of the existential that invites a more

flexible and encompassing approach attuned to the raw messiness of the lived experience. Furthermore, I have chosen to move between psychoanalysis and existentialism as two areas that complement each other, growing from the question of meaning and drawing on a shared concern about the personal and relational experience of the self in the world. Moving between those two trains of thought is also intended to offer a way in which subjectivity and creativity, rather than one theory, remain at the centre of research; that is both children in their play and myself as I play with meanings in the light of our encounters together.

The above limitation is more pertinent in my research given that, with their focus on the everydayness, my observations are deprived of the children's personal context: meaning remains pending largely between the child and myself without a chance to ground it to the child's context. In the light of this limitation there is, thus, scope for further research in the existential approach in therapy with young children.

The present research on the existential is restricted to the context of children's everyday lives at the nursery and as such it invites further research on children's existential encounters in other childhood social contexts such as school, home and play spaces. It also invites research into less ordinary contexts such as hospitals and refugee camps drawing attention to children's existential meanings in the face of life events such as death, illness, trauma and dislocation.

### **7.3 Ending**

The present research is a reverie of the existential as it dialogues with May's, Nadia's, Edward's, Baba's and Eilidh's inside and outside worlds during our time together. It is located between us, in the times and the spaces that we occupied during the observations and does not look to exceed these. As such, it is not a study of the existential in preschool children's lives but a reflection on the existential during my time with these five children and in the context of our relationship. It hence looks to offers some attention to the individual content, the quality and the symbolic form of the existential in children's lives as it emerges relationally and as thought psychosocially.

Rather than turning away from the question of those liminal spaces, I stayed with them, acknowledging them not only as inevitable in the study of the experience of the other from the place of the self, but also as a creative source.

I began my thesis by locating my research in the context of my previous psychoanalytic observations with preschool children when the question of the existential emerged and

challenged my position as a psychoanalytic observer and the meaning that I make from that place. I chose to explore this challenge by staying with it for longer, thus, doing psychoanalytic observations with preschool children with a focus on their existential encounters. I reviewed my topic in wider literature, focusing on how the existential has been present in the work with children as well as how it has interacted with psychoanalysis. My review pointed to a place for a work on preschool children's relationship with the existential in their everyday contexts and to an opening up of the psychosocial dialogue between psychoanalysis and existentialism to encompass children's lives. In the section on my research design, I describe my methodology and how I take a relational turn to inform the onto-epistemology of my psychoanalytic observations in order to attend to and further explore the blurred boundary between the child and myself in our encounters. The presentation of my methodology is followed by my analysis which, influenced by some feminist thinking, becomes a writing into an inquiry of the existential in the context of a dialogue between some psychoanalytic and some existential ideas. My analytic work covers five chapters, each growing from a child and the existential as it emerged in our relationship. Each chapter speaks to our reciprocal, more or less conscious, encounters with nothingness, strangeness, ontological security, death, and selfhood, embedded in time and space. Reciprocity emerged embodied in reverie revealing of our interpersonal unconscious communication. Revealing, also, of our inescapable blurred boundaries and our inescapable share under life's existential givens.

What happens at the end of a text? Here again we have much to learn from what dreams, our masters, do with us. The author is in the book as we are in the dream's boat. We always have the belief and the illusion that we are the ones writing, that we are the ones dreaming. Clearly this isn't true. We are not having the dream, the dream has us, carries us, and, at a given moment, it drops us, even if the dream is in the author in the way the text is assumed to be. What we call texts escape us as the dream escapes us on waking, or the dream evades us in dreams (Cixous, 1993:98)

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## **Appendices**



## Children's existential questions

### Information Leaflet for the Director of the Centre

#### *The research project*

The present research is an exploration of children's existential questions as these are played out in their everyday lives at the nursery.

By existential questions I refer to children's wonderings about everyday experiences and their meaning in relation to themselves and to life as such. For example, a child's question about their mummy's tummy might be both personal and universal, ordinary and profound.

These questions can be expressed verbally or more symbolically in children's encounters with each other, their teachers, other people, a toy or an object, in children's play and in their art.



*D, 7 years old*

This project is part of my PhD research thesis in the department of Counselling and Psychotherapy, at the University of Edinburgh.

The supervisors of my research are Professor Liz Bondi and Dr Jonathan Wyatt. All the research information will be kept anonymous and confidential and will only be used for academic and research purposes. My research is governed by University of Edinburgh Research Ethics Framework and is approved by the Edinburgh Council Children and Families department. I have undergone a Criminal Records Bureau Check at the Enhanced Disclosure Level.

#### *Background*

I hold a BA Hons in Philosophy and Pedagogic Psychology and an MSc in Art therapy. This current project emerged from my 3-years playwork experience with children in a primary school in Edinburgh as well as from my training in Therapeutic work with children and young people which involved 3 years of infant observations and young child observations at a nursery.

#### *At the nursery*

To undertake this research I would like to spend time with the children at the

nursery observing their play and their encounters. I will be at the nursery twice a week for one hour until the end of the summer term. During this time I will observe children in their ordinary activities at the nursery as they unfold during the time that I am present. I will write notes about what I observe in which the children, the nursery staff, the people they interact with and the premises will be anonymised by means of pseudonyms. My notes will be kept confidential. I will only use fully anonymised extracts of my notes in the writing of my thesis and other publications. My observations do not involve an active engagement or therapeutic intervention on my part.

I would like to ask for your consent to conduct my research at (name of the nursery). Please be aware that you can withdraw your consent at any time. Please fill in and sign the consent form below if you consent for this research to take place at (name of the nursery).

If you have any queries about this research project please find below the contact information of my supervisors:

Professor Liz Bondi, Counselling and Psychotherapy, School of Health in Social Sciences, 1M5, Doorway 6, Medical School, Teviot Place  
E-mail: [Liz.bondi@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Liz.bondi@ed.ac.uk)  
Tel: 0131 650 2529

Dr Jonathan Wyatt, Counselling and Psychotherapy, School of Health in Social Sciences, 1M3, Doorway 6, Medical School, Teviot Place  
E-mail: [jonathan.wyatt@ed.ac.uk](mailto:jonathan.wyatt@ed.ac.uk)  
Tel: 0131 651 3974

And the Chair of the Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethics Review Committee:

Dr Alette Willis, Counselling and Psychotherapy, School of Health in Social Sciences, Doorway 6, Medical School, Teviot Place  
E-mail: [a.willis@ed.ac.uk](mailto:a.willis@ed.ac.uk)  
Tel: 0131 650 3893

Thank you,  
Zoi

*Zoi Simopoulou*  
*PhD research student Counselling and Psychotherapy, School of Health in Social Sciences, 3rd Floor, Doorway 6, Medical School, Teviot Place*  
E-mail: [Z.Simopoulou@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:Z.Simopoulou@sms.ed.ac.uk)





### Consent form for the Director of the Centre

I have read and understood the information leaflet that is attached to this consent form.

I understand that Zoi will be at the nursery for 1 hour, twice a week until the end of the summer term.

I understand that Zoi will observe children at the nursery during their ordinary activities, their play and their interactions.

I understand that Zoi has asked parents', children's and nursery staff's consent for this research.

I understand that all data will be kept anonymous and confidential and that the names of children, parents, nursery staff and the premises will be anonymized to conceal the identity of the participants.

I understand that the research data will be used solely for academic and research purposes, including Zoi's PhD thesis and other publications.

I understand that (name of the nursery) can opt out from this research project and can withdraw any information that has been provided.

I give permission to Zoi to conduct her research at (name of the nursery).

---

Name

Signature



## Children's existential questions

### Information Leaflet for Nursery Staff

#### *The research project*

The present research is an exploration of children's existential questions as these are played out in their everyday lives at the nursery.

By existential questions I refer to children's wonderings about everyday experiences and their meaning in relation to themselves and to life as such. For example, a child's question about their mummy's tummy can be both personal and universal, ordinary and profound.

These questions can be expressed verbally or more symbolically in children's encounters with each other, their teachers, other people, a toy or an object, in children's play and in their art.



*D, 7 years old*

This project is part of my PhD research thesis in the department of Counselling and Psychotherapy, at the University of Edinburgh.

The supervisors of my research are Professor Liz Bondi and Dr Jonathan Wyatt. All the research information will be kept anonymous and confidential and will only be used for academic and research purposes. My research is governed by University of Edinburgh Research Ethics Framework and is approved by the Edinburgh Council Children and Families department.

#### *Background*

I hold a BA Hons in Philosophy and Pedagogic Psychology and an MSc in Art therapy. This current project emerged from my 3-years playwork experience with children in a primary school in Edinburgh as well as from my training in Therapeutic work with children and young people which involved 3 years of infant observations and young child observations at a nursery.

#### *At the nursery*

To undertake this research I will spend time with the children at the nursery observing their play and their encounters. I will be at the nursery twice a week for

one hour until the end of the summer term. During this time I will observe children in their ordinary activities at the nursery as they unfold during the time that I am present. I will then take notes of what I observe. Although my research focuses on children, children will, at times, interact with the nursery staff. I am contacting you to ask for your consent to write about my observations of the child's possible encounters with you in the context of their ordinary day at the nursery. In my notes, your names, as well as the names of the children, the people they might interact with and the premises, will be anonymised by means of pseudonyms. My notes will be kept confidential. I will only use fully anonymised extracts of my notes in the writing of my thesis and in other publications. My observations do not involve an active engagement or therapeutic intervention on my part.

Please find attached an opt-out consent form for this project. Unless I hear to the contrary by Friday 21<sup>st</sup> March I will assume that you are willing for me to include you in my notes of the children's interactions with you. If you decided you do not wish to consent, I will make sure that I will not write about you in my notes.

I would be happy to meet with you at the nursery and discuss any questions about my project. I would very much welcome any thoughts you might have about this project drawing on your experience with the children at the nursery.

You can also contact me by e-mail at:  
[Z.Simopoulou@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:Z.Simopoulou@sms.ed.ac.uk)

If you have any queries about this research project please find below the contact information of my supervisors:

Professor Liz Bondi, Counselling and Psychotherapy, School of Health in Social Sciences, 1M5, Doorway 6, Medical School, Teviot Place  
E-mail: [liz.bondi@ed.ac.uk](mailto:liz.bondi@ed.ac.uk)  
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E-mail: [a.willis@ed.ac.uk](mailto:a.willis@ed.ac.uk)  
Tel: 0131 650 3893

If you have any concerns about the project please contact (name and contact details of the nursery manager).

Thank you,  
Zoi

*Zoi Simopoulou*  
*PhD research student Counselling and Psychotherapy, School of Health in Social Sciences, 3rd Floor, Doorway 6, Medical School, Teviot Place*



### **Opt-out Form for Nursery Staff**

An information leaflet is attached to this form. Please read it before making a decision about consent.

If you agree to take part in this project you do not need to do anything.

If you do not want to take part in this project, please fill in the opt-out consent form below and return it to the nursery by Friday 21st March 2014, for the attention of Zoi Simopoulou.

Please remember that even if you consent to your participation in the project, you can choose to opt out at any point during the research.

---

I do not wish to take part in this research project. My details are as follows:

My name

Signature

Date





## Children's existential questions

### Information Leaflet for Parents

#### *The research project*

The present research is an exploration of children's existential questions as these are played out in their everyday lives at the nursery.

By existential questions I refer to children's wonderings about everyday experiences and their meaning in relation to themselves and to life as such. For example, a child's question about their mummy's tummy might be both personal and universal, ordinary and profound.

These questions can be expressed verbally or more symbolically in children's encounters with each other, their teachers, other people, a toy or an object, in children's play and in their art.



*D, 7 years old*

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The supervisors of my research are Professor Liz Bondi and Dr Jonathan Wyatt. All the research information will be kept anonymous and confidential and will only be used for academic and research purposes. My research is governed by University of Edinburgh Research Ethics Framework and is approved by the Edinburgh Council Children and Families department.

#### *Background*

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#### *At the nursery*

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one hour until the end of the summer term. During this time I will observe children in their ordinary activities at the nursery as they unfold during the time that I am present. I will write notes about what I observe in which all children, the nursery staff and the premises will be anonymised by means of pseudonyms. The notes will be kept confidential. I will only use fully anonymised extracts of my notes in the writing of my thesis and other publications. My observations do not involve an active engagement or therapeutic intervention on my part.

I am contacting you to ask for your consent for your child's participation in this project. Unless I hear to the contrary by 21<sup>st</sup> March I will assume that you are willing for me to include your child in the project. If you decided you do not wish your child to be included, I will make sure I will not write about them in my notes. Please keep in mind that even if you consent for this project, you can withdraw your consent at any point if you change your mind. Following parents' consent, I will also ask for children's consent to take part in this project. The children can decide not to take part in the project at any time.

I would be happy to meet you in person at the nursery and discuss with you about my project. If you have any questions please contact me by e-mail at:  
[Z.Simopoulou@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:Z.Simopoulou@sms.ed.ac.uk)

If you have any queries about this research project please find below the contact information of my supervisors:

Professor Liz Bondi, Counselling and Psychotherapy, School of Health in Social Sciences, 1M5, Doorway 6, Medical School, Teviot Place  
E-mail: [Liz.bondi@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Liz.bondi@ed.ac.uk)  
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Dr Jonathan Wyatt, Counselling and Psychotherapy, School of Health in Social Sciences, 1M3, Doorway 6, Medical School, Teviot Place  
E-mail: [jonathan.wyatt@ed.ac.uk](mailto:jonathan.wyatt@ed.ac.uk)  
Tel: 0131 651 3974

And the Chair of the Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethics Review Committee:

Dr Alette Willis, Counselling and Psychotherapy, School of Health in Social Sciences, Doorway 6, Medical School, Teviot Place  
E-mail: [a.willis@ed.ac.uk](mailto:a.willis@ed.ac.uk)  
Tel: 0131 650 3893

If you have any concerns about the project please contact (name and contact details of the nursery manager).

Thank you,  
Zoi

*Zoi Simopoulou  
PhD research student Counselling and Psychotherapy, School of Health in Social Sciences, 3rd Floor, Doorway 6, Medical School, Teviot Place*



## Parents' Opt-out Form

An information leaflet is attached to this form. Please read it before making a decision about consent.

If you are OK with your child taking part in this project you do not need to do anything.

If you do not want your child to take part in this project, please fill in the opt-out consent form below and return it to the nursery by Friday 21st March 2014, for the attention of Zoi Simopoulou.

Please remember that even if you consent to your child's participation in the project, you can choose to opt out at any point during the research.

---

I do not wish my child to take part in this research project. My details are as follows:

Child's name

My name

Signature

Date









Nadia





Edward



In the torn piece at the top left Edward wrote his name



Baba







Eilidh





